Jim Henson's™

THE STORYTELLER™

Sirens

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Sirens

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THE STORY

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TELLER™

Sirens

THE MERMAID AND THE FISHERMAN

Story by
Bartosz Sztybor

Art by
Jakub Rebelka

EMPRESS WA

Story & Art by
Chan Chau

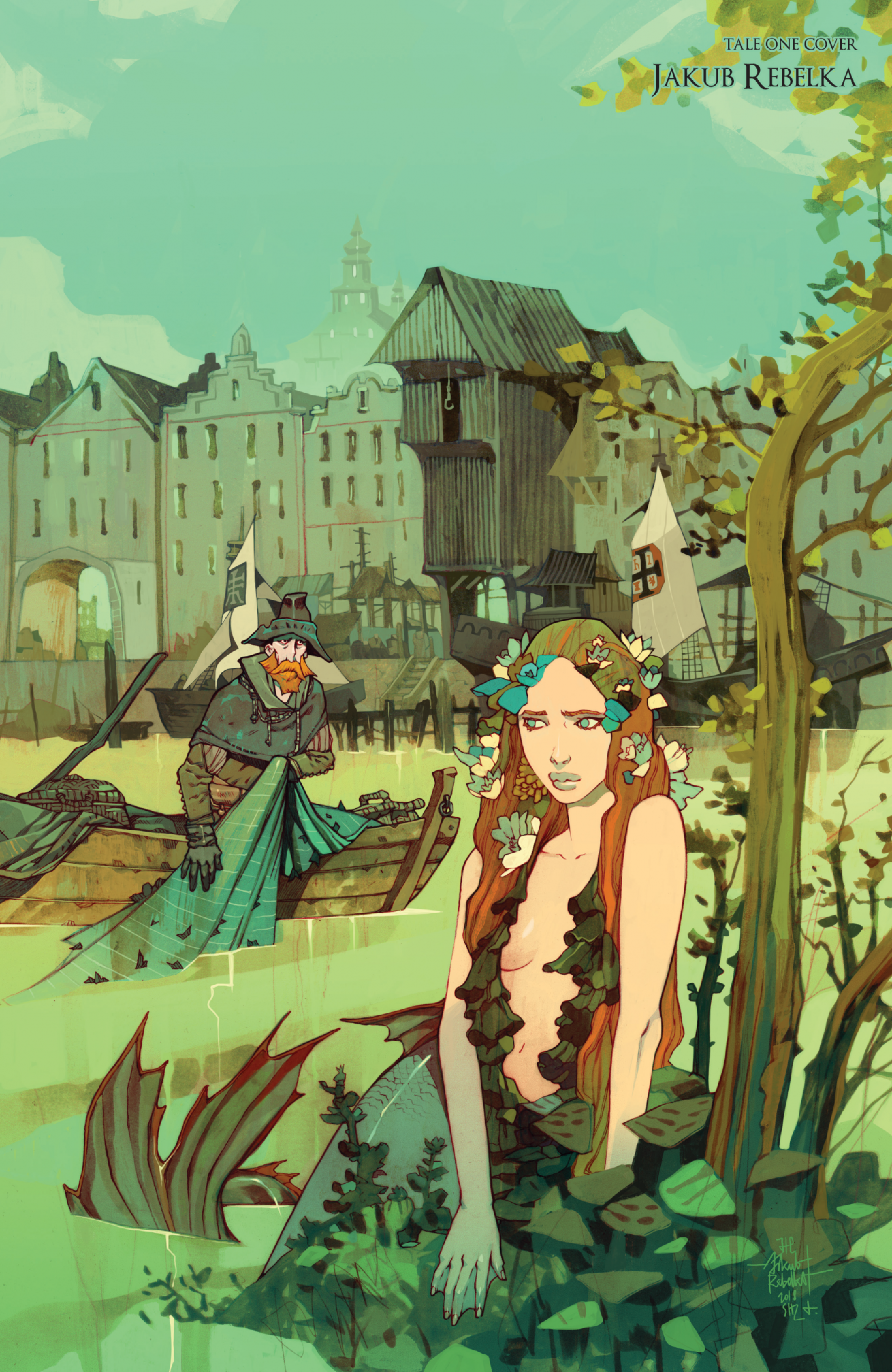
ONE SPARED TO THE SEA

Story & Art by
Sarah Webb

LORELEI: DAUGHTER OF THE RHINE

Story & Art by
Aud Koch

Letters by
Tim Campbell



TALE ONE COVER

JAKUB REBELKA

Jakub Rebelka 2018

the MERMAID and the FISHERMAN

I was born in Warsaw, the capital of Poland, and it's impossible to live here not knowing anything about mermaids. You have to try really hard to not see all the monuments, statues, fountains, and engravings with sirens on them. Even Warsaw's coat of arms is a mermaid, and it's been this way since 1390. Living in Warsaw is like living in a pond full of sirens.

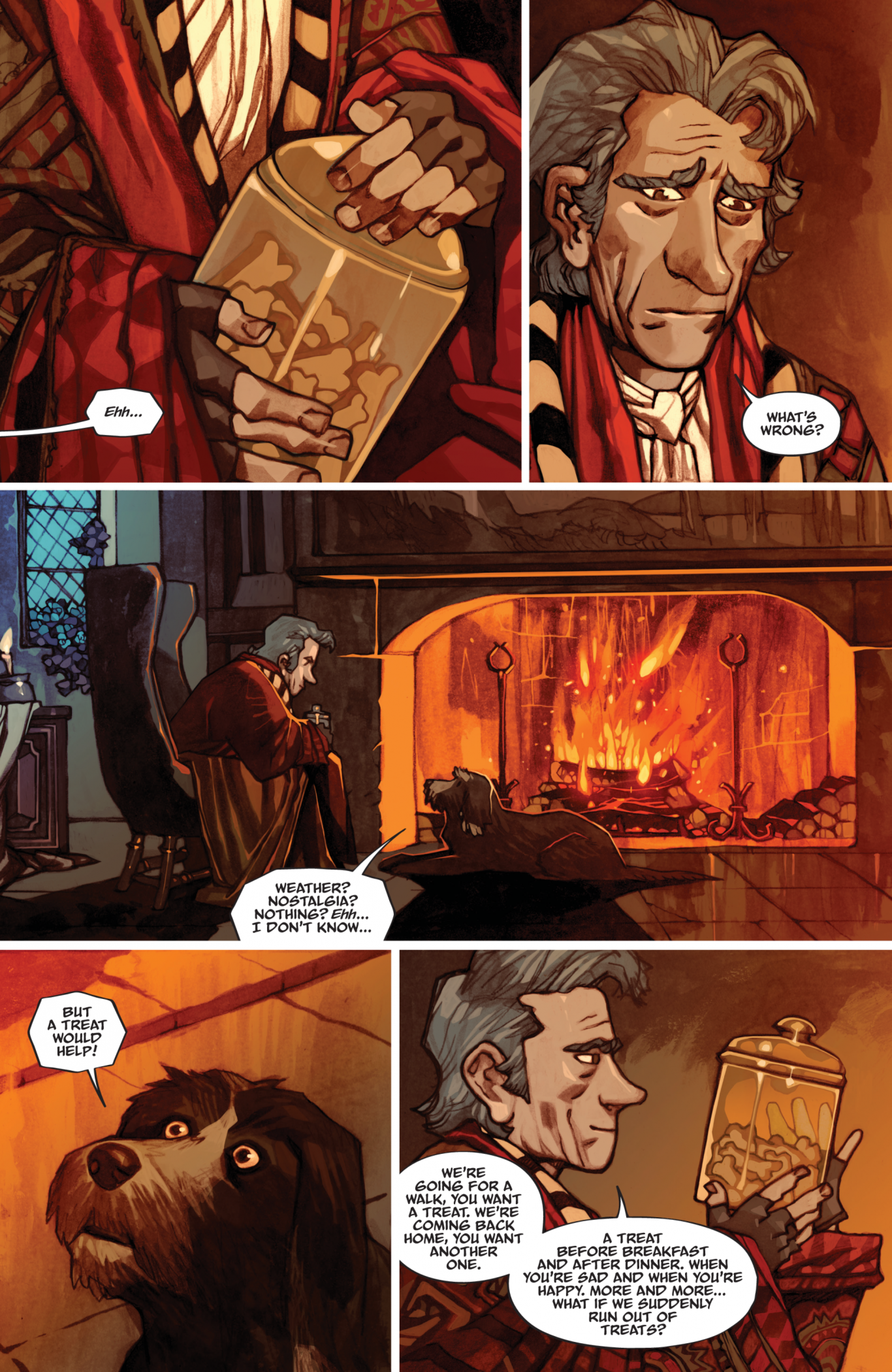
In Greek mythology, sirens are creatures which combined women and birds in various ways. Mermaids, on the other hand, are aquatic creatures with a woman's upper body and the tail of a fish. The Polish word "syrenka" comes from the word "siren," but the creature itself is a water mermaid called "meluzyna," which translates to "mermaid." Not that easy to understand, right? It never is with Poland.

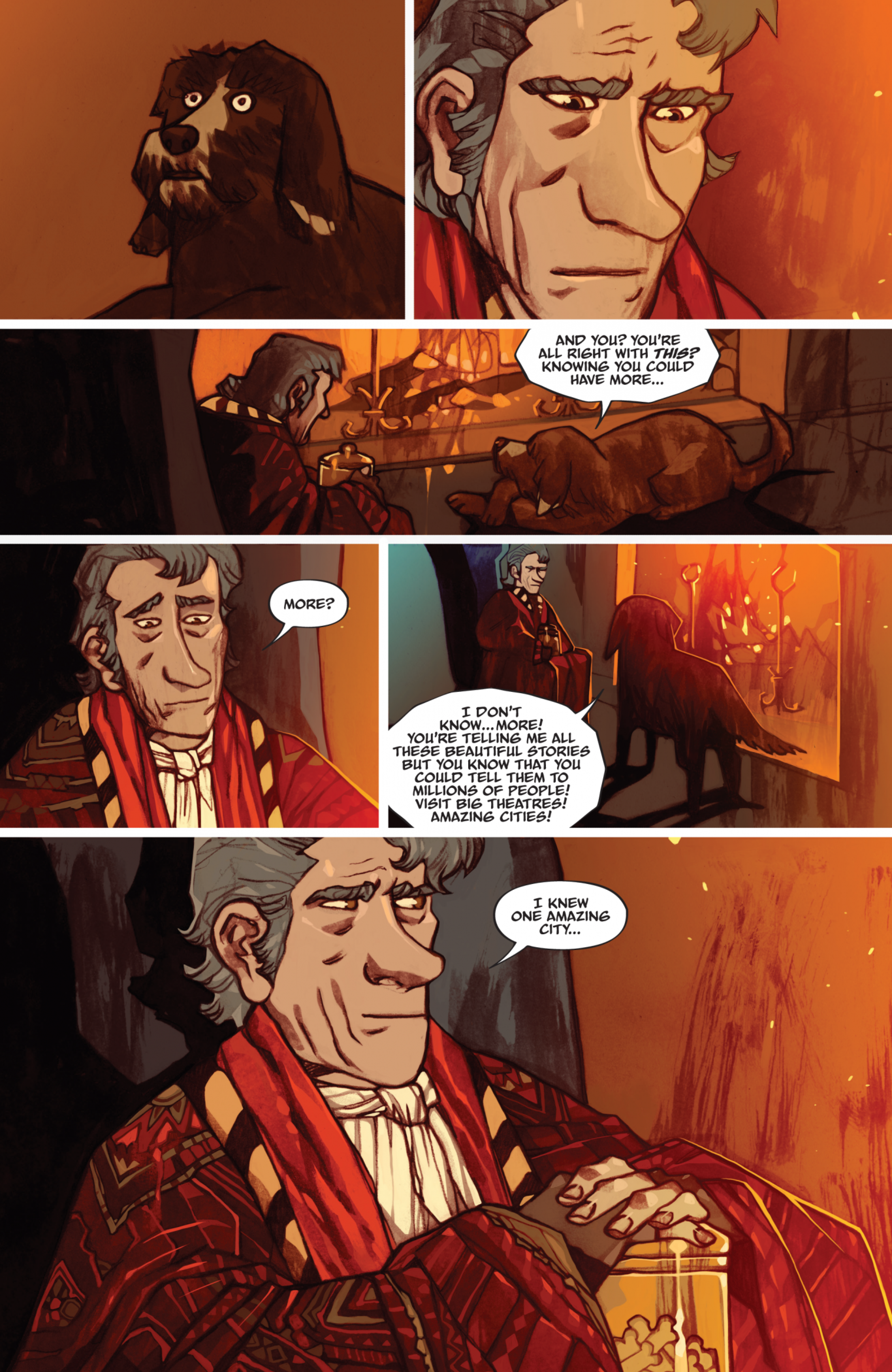
There are lots of legends about mermaids in Poland, and almost all of them are very similar. There's always a mermaid and there's always someone (a prince or a fisherman) who hears her beautiful song and then catches and imprisons her. Overwhelmed by her sad singing, he releases her, and then the grateful mermaid helps him with his problem, which is either protecting the city or finding a way home.

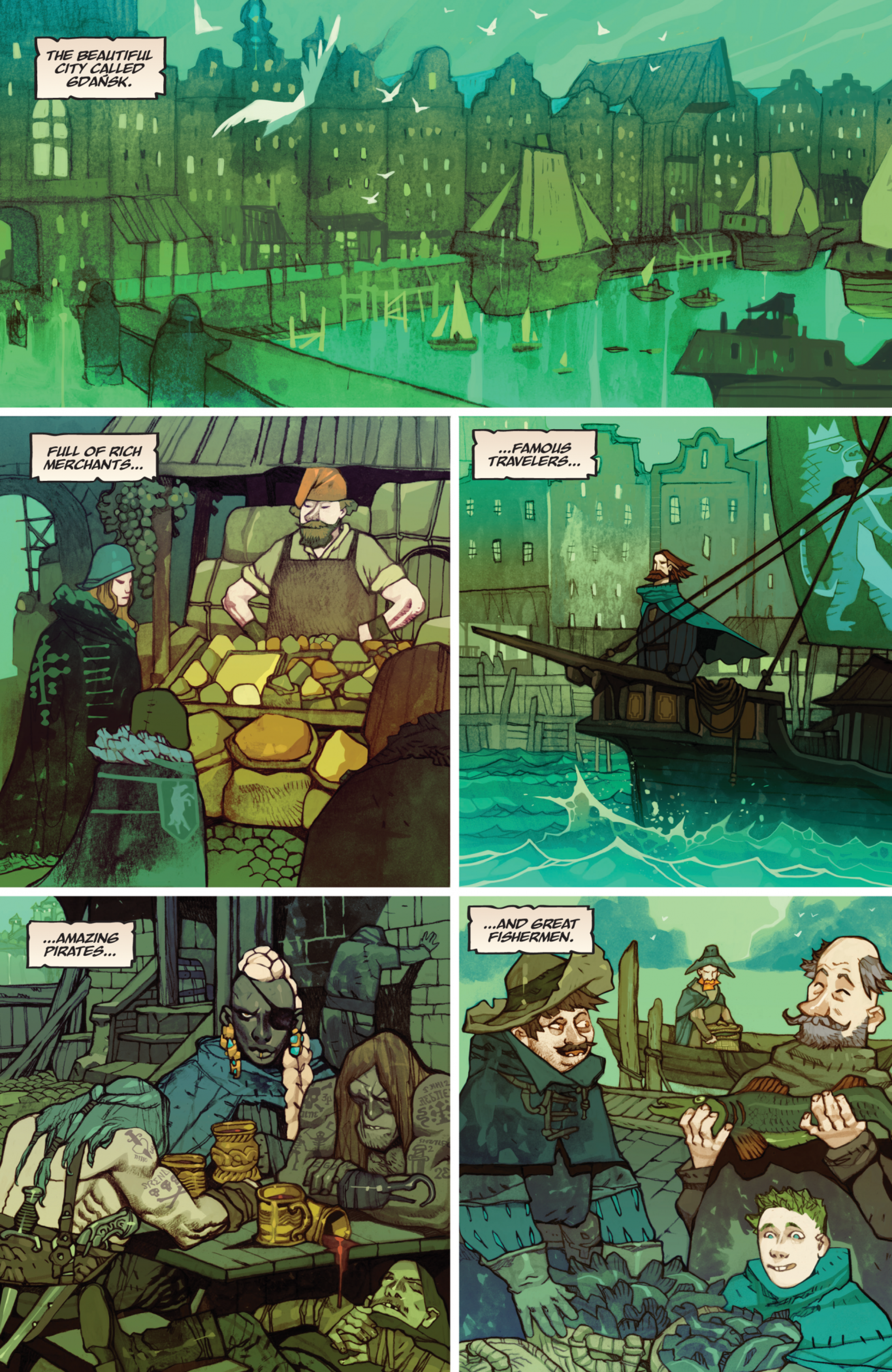
I used these characters as the main hook in my story, but I made it more about the character and his troubles, not about the consequences for the whole city. I changed the location of the city, too. I love Warsaw, my mermaid pond, but I moved the location to Gdańsk, a coastal city in northern Poland where artist Jakub Rebelka lives. He showed me a lot of illustrations and drawings depicting 14th century Gdańsk full of amazing buildings, ships, and pirates. We felt that this omnipresence of water would be better for the story about a fisherman whose beautiful dreams and worst nightmares come from the sea.

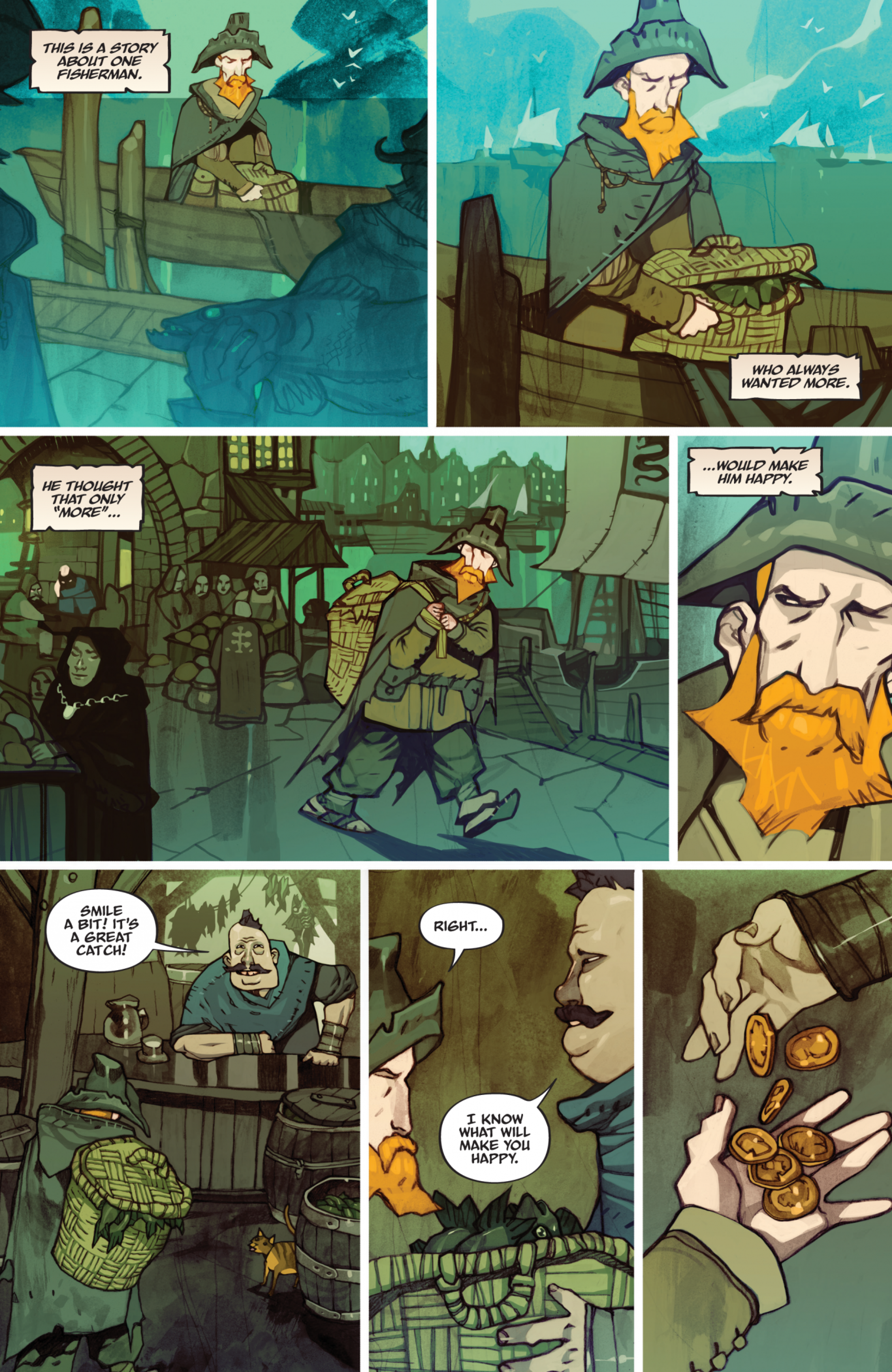
What interested me most was the singing, and the question of how something so beautiful could become so utterly sad. And then, it came to me: All those legends are in fact stories about trying to fill the emotional void with a quick fix, with something seemingly amazing that is revealed to be a curse. I wanted to create a story about that void, about greed and gluttony and, last but not least, addiction. A story that raises the question of when and why a simple pleasure becomes an addiction. This question applies to all the characters in the tale: the fisherman, the dog, the storyteller himself–and me.

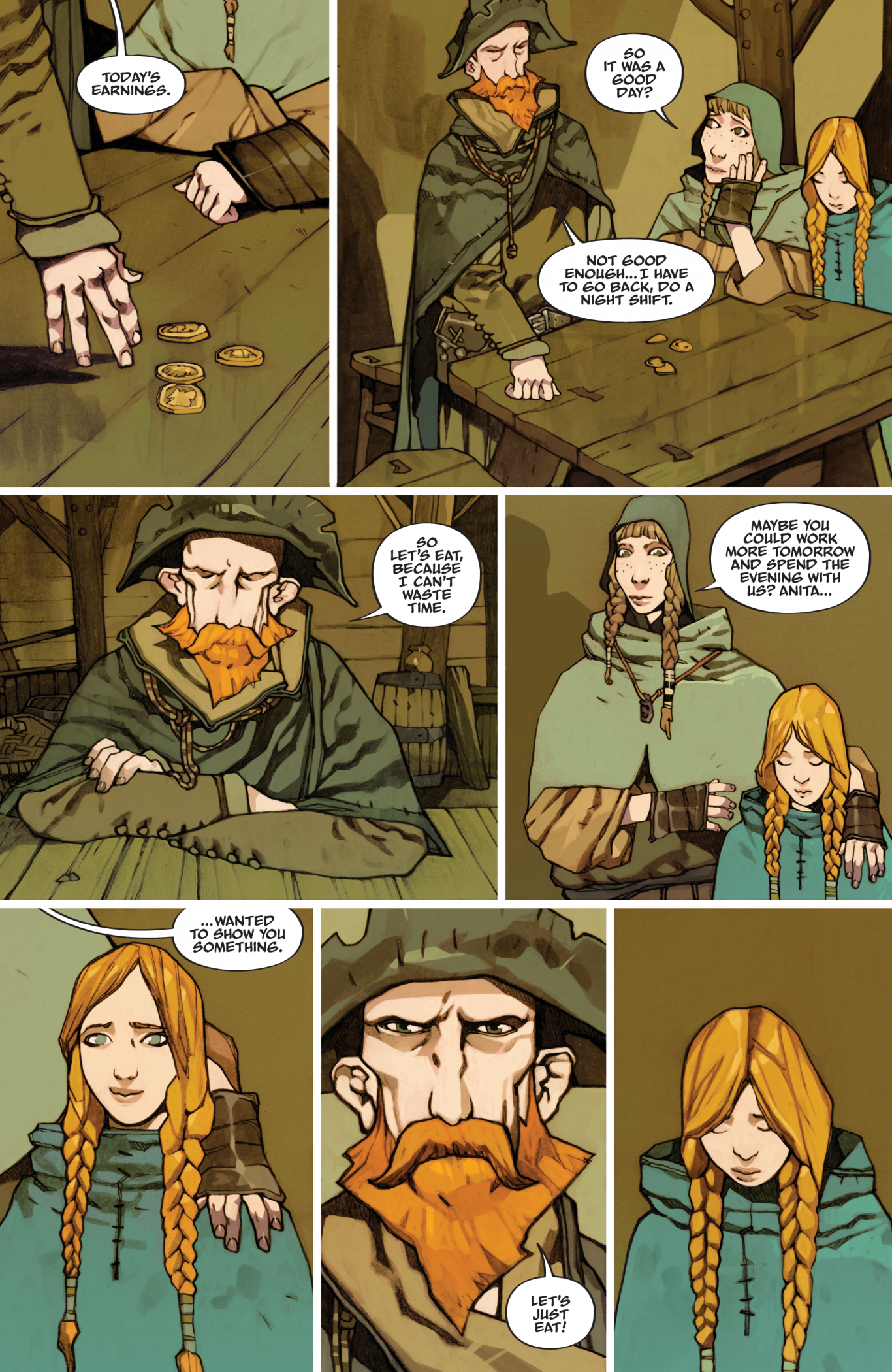
– Bartosz Sztybor

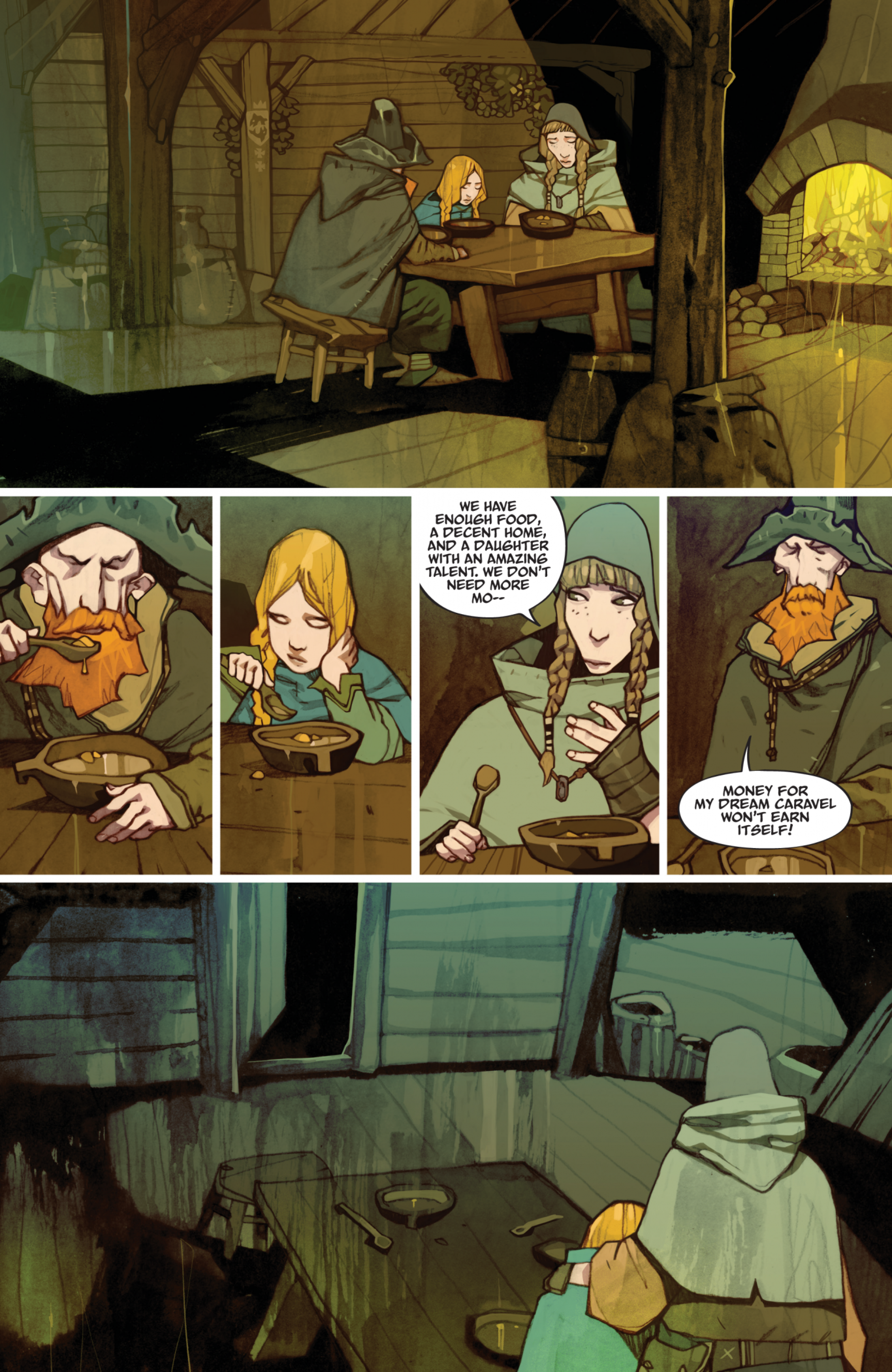

Ehh...
WHAT'S WRONG?
WEATHER? NOSTALGIA? NOTHING? *Ehh...* I DON'T KNOW...
BUT A TREAT WOULD HELP!
WE'RE GOING FOR A WALK, YOU WANT A TREAT. WE'RE COMING BACK HOME, YOU WANT ANOTHER ONE.
A TREAT BEFORE BREAKFAST AND AFTER DINNER. WHEN YOU'RE SAD AND WHEN YOU'RE HAPPY. MORE AND MORE... WHAT IF WE SUDDENLY RUN OUT OF TREATS?

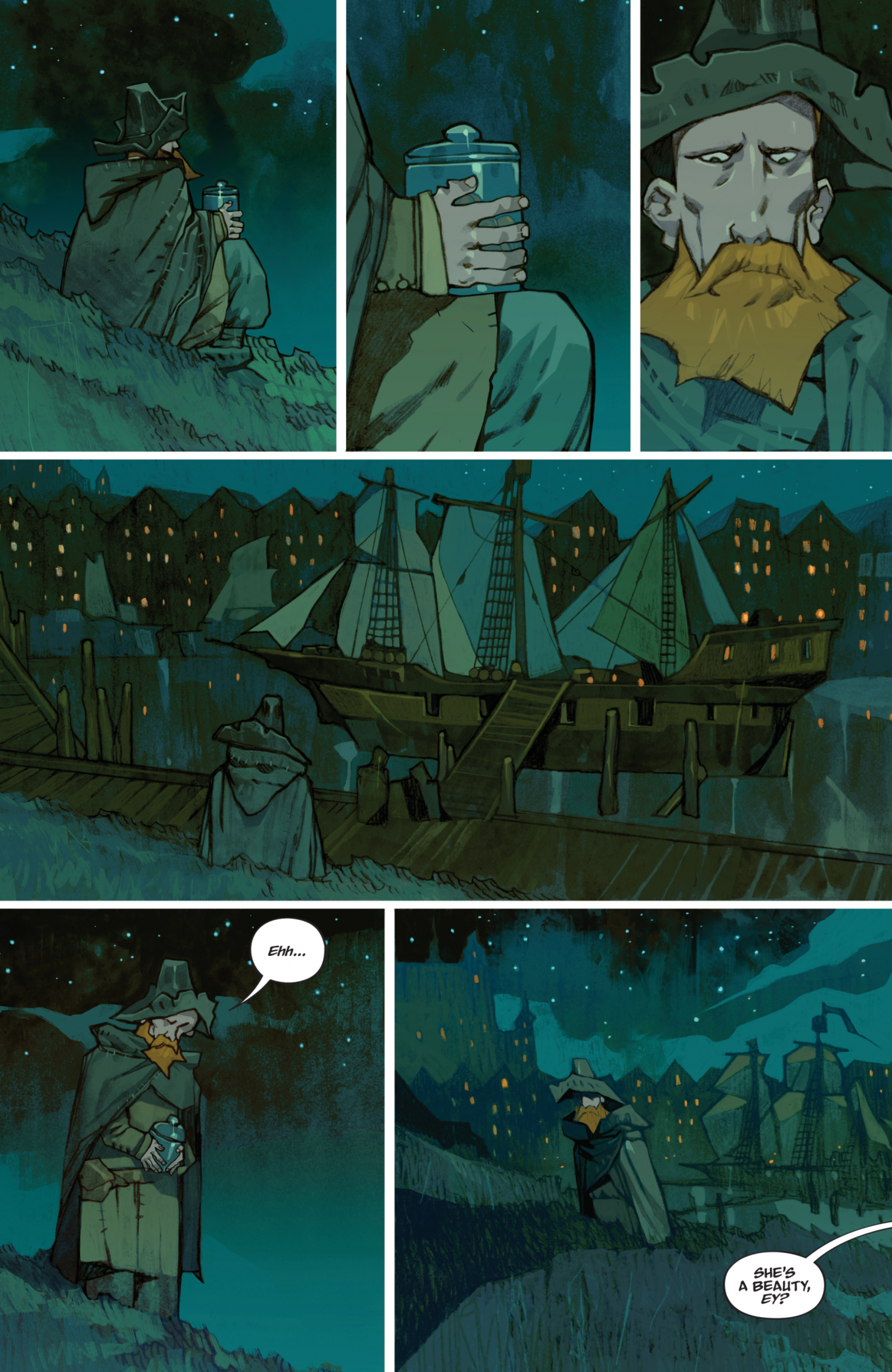

AND YOU? YOU'RE ALL RIGHT WITH *THIS*? KNOWING YOU COULD HAVE MORE...
MORE?
I DON'T KNOW...MORE! YOU'RE TELLING ME ALL THESE BEAUTIFUL STORIES BUT YOU KNOW THAT YOU COULD TELL THEM TO MILLIONS OF PEOPLE! VISIT BIG THEATRES! AMAZING CITIES!
I KNEW ONE AMAZING CITY...

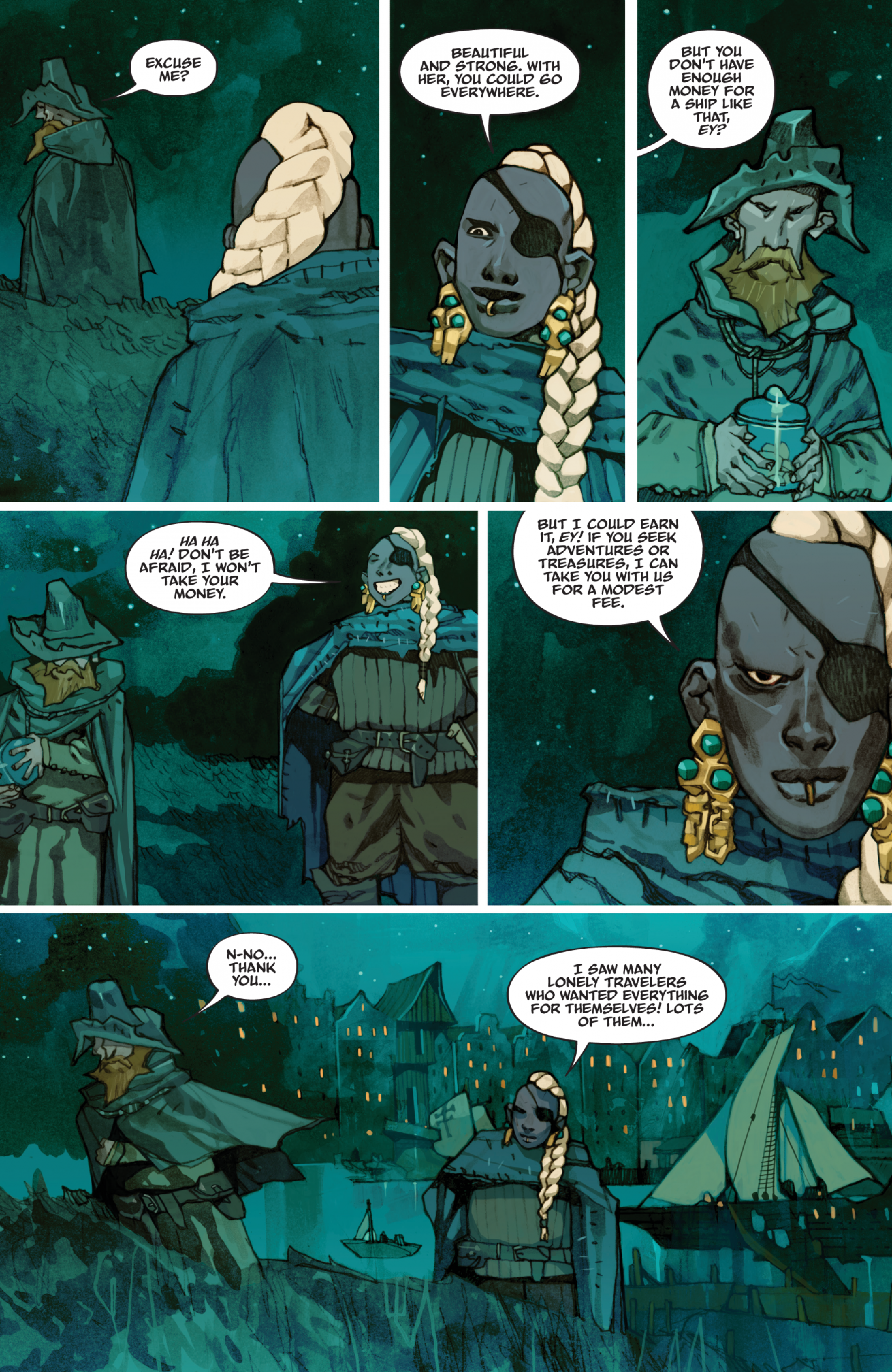

THE BEAUTIFUL CITY CALLED GDAŃSK.
FULL OF RICH MERCHANTS...
...FAMOUS TRAVELERS...
...AMAZING PIRATES...
...AND GREAT FISHERMEN.

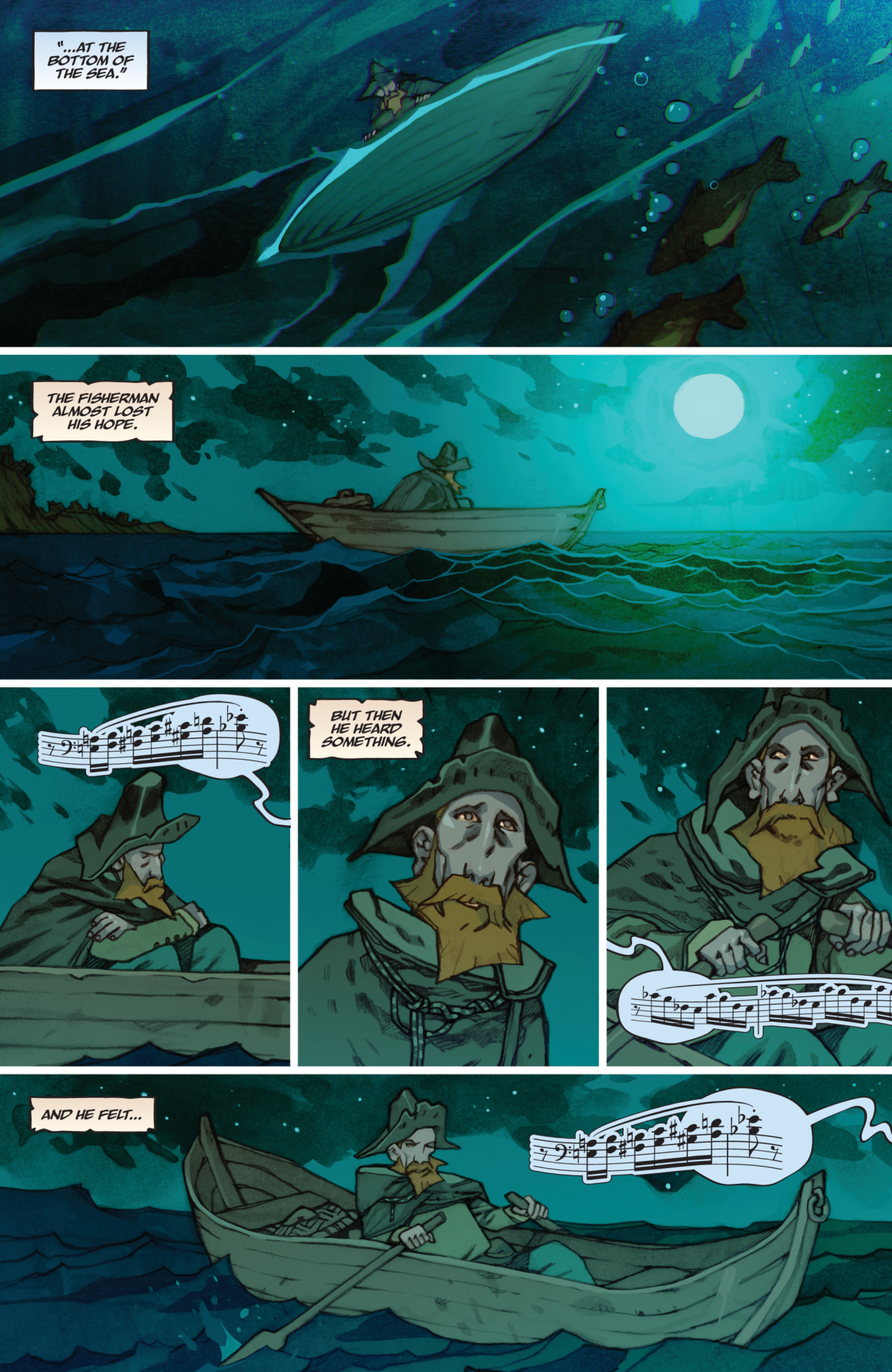

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT ONE FISHERMAN.
WHO ALWAYS WANTED MORE.
HE THOUGHT THAT ONLY "MORE"...
...WOULD MAKE HIM HAPPY.
SMILE A BIT! IT'S A GREAT CATCH!
RIGHT...
I KNOW WHAT WILL MAKE YOU HAPPY.

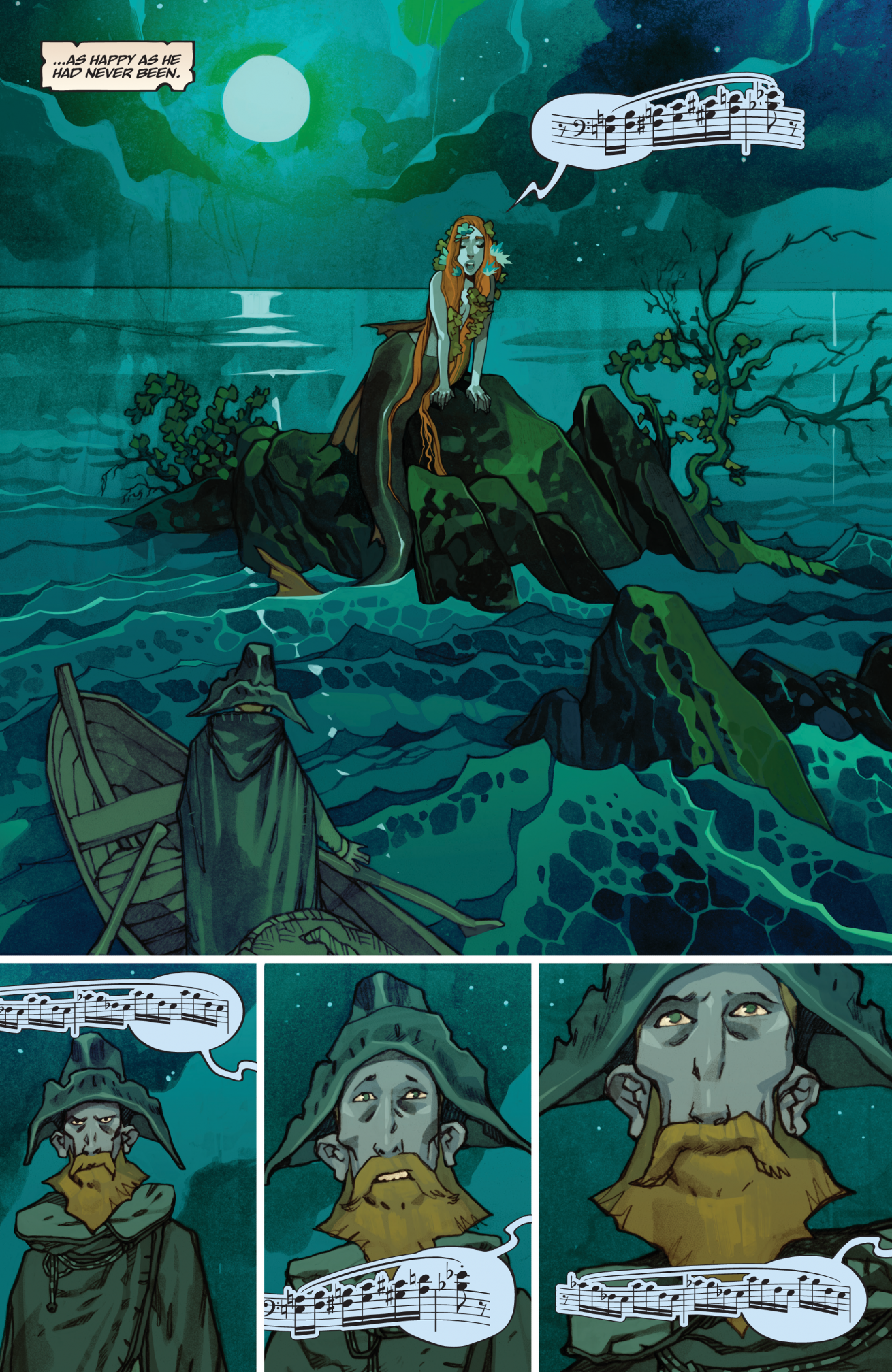

TODAY'S EARNINGS.
SO IT WAS A GOOD DAY?
NOT GOOD ENOUGH... I HAVE TO GO BACK, DO A NIGHT SHIFT.
SO LET'S EAT, BECAUSE I CAN'T WASTE TIME.
MAYBE YOU COULD WORK MORE TOMORROW AND SPEND THE EVENING WITH US? ANITA...
...WANTED TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.
LET'S JUST EAT!

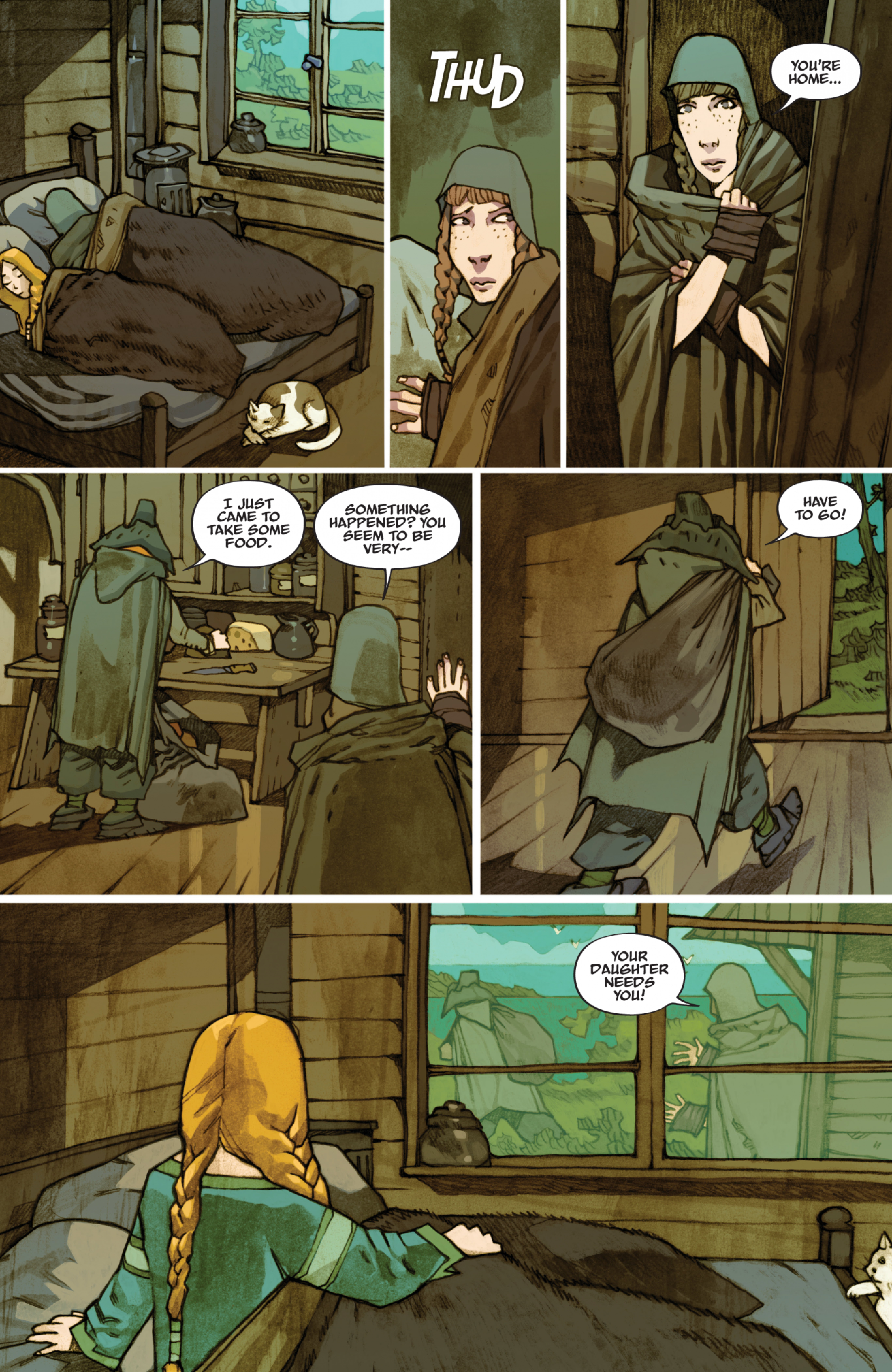

WE HAVE ENOUGH FOOD, A DECENT HOME, AND A DAUGHTER WITH AN AMAZING TALENT. WE DON'T NEED MORE MO--
MONEY FOR MY DREAM CARAVEL WON'T EARN ITSELF!

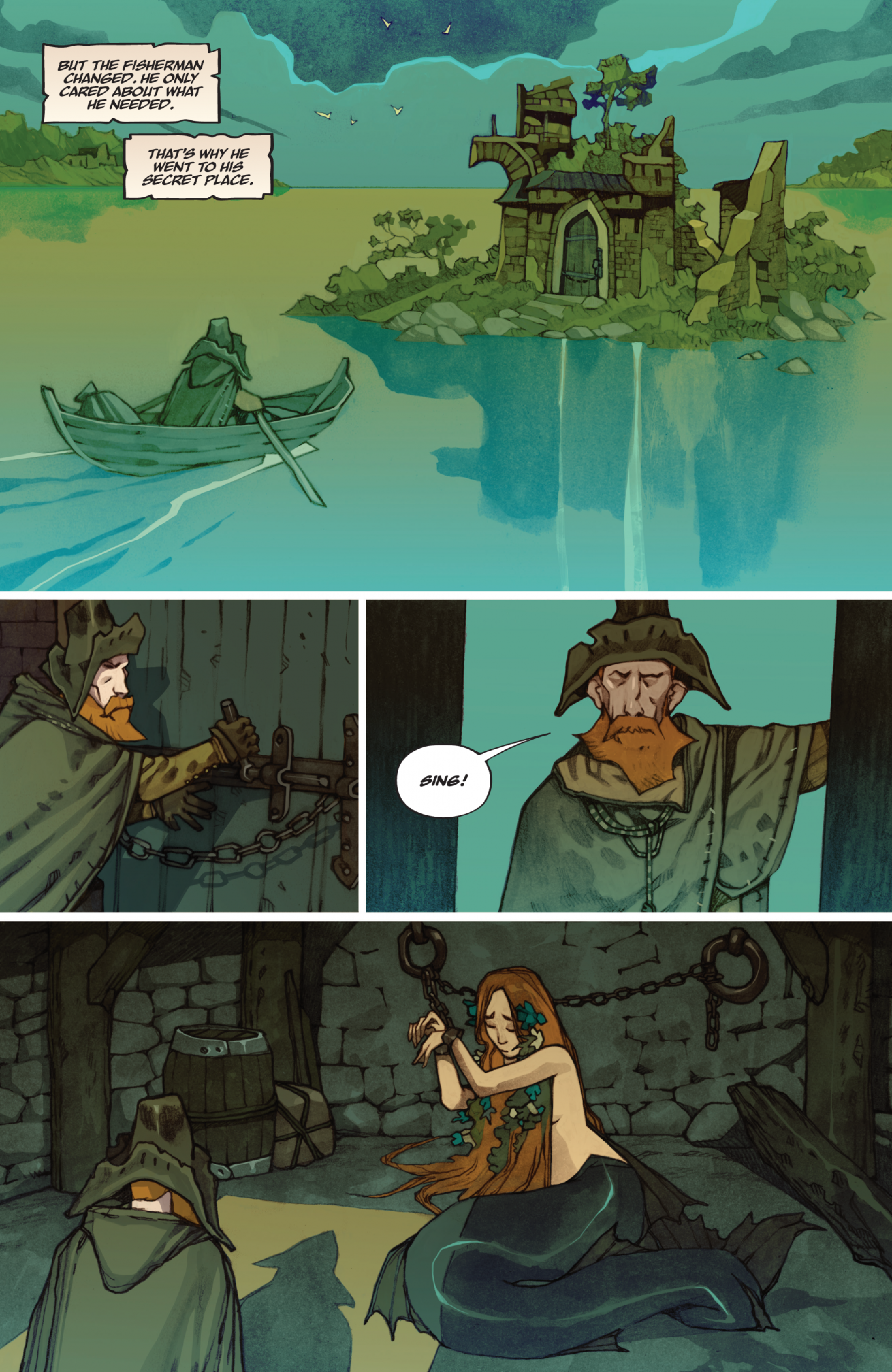

Ehh...
SHE'S A BEAUTY, EY?

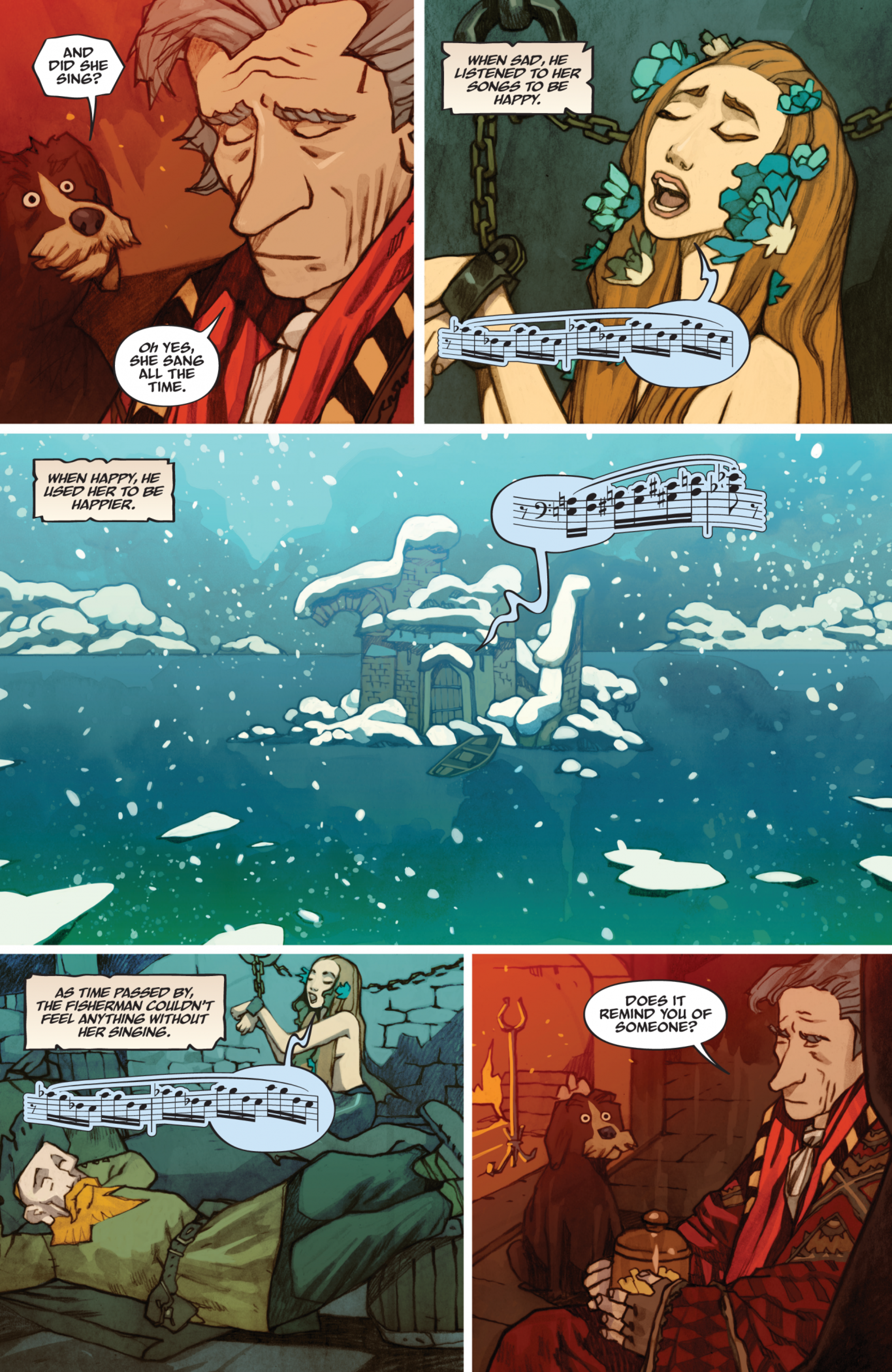

EXCUSE ME?
BEAUTIFUL AND STRONG. WITH HER, YOU COULD GO EVERYWHERE.
BUT YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY FOR A SHIP LIKE THAT, *EY?*
HA HA HA! DON'T BE AFRAID, I WON'T TAKE YOUR MONEY.
BUT I COULD EARN IT, *EY!* IF YOU SEEK ADVENTURES OR TREASURES, I CAN TAKE YOU WITH US FOR A MODEST FEE.
N-NO... THANK YOU...
I SAW MANY LONELY TRAVELERS WHO WANTED EVERYTHING FOR THEMSELVES! LOTS OF THEM...

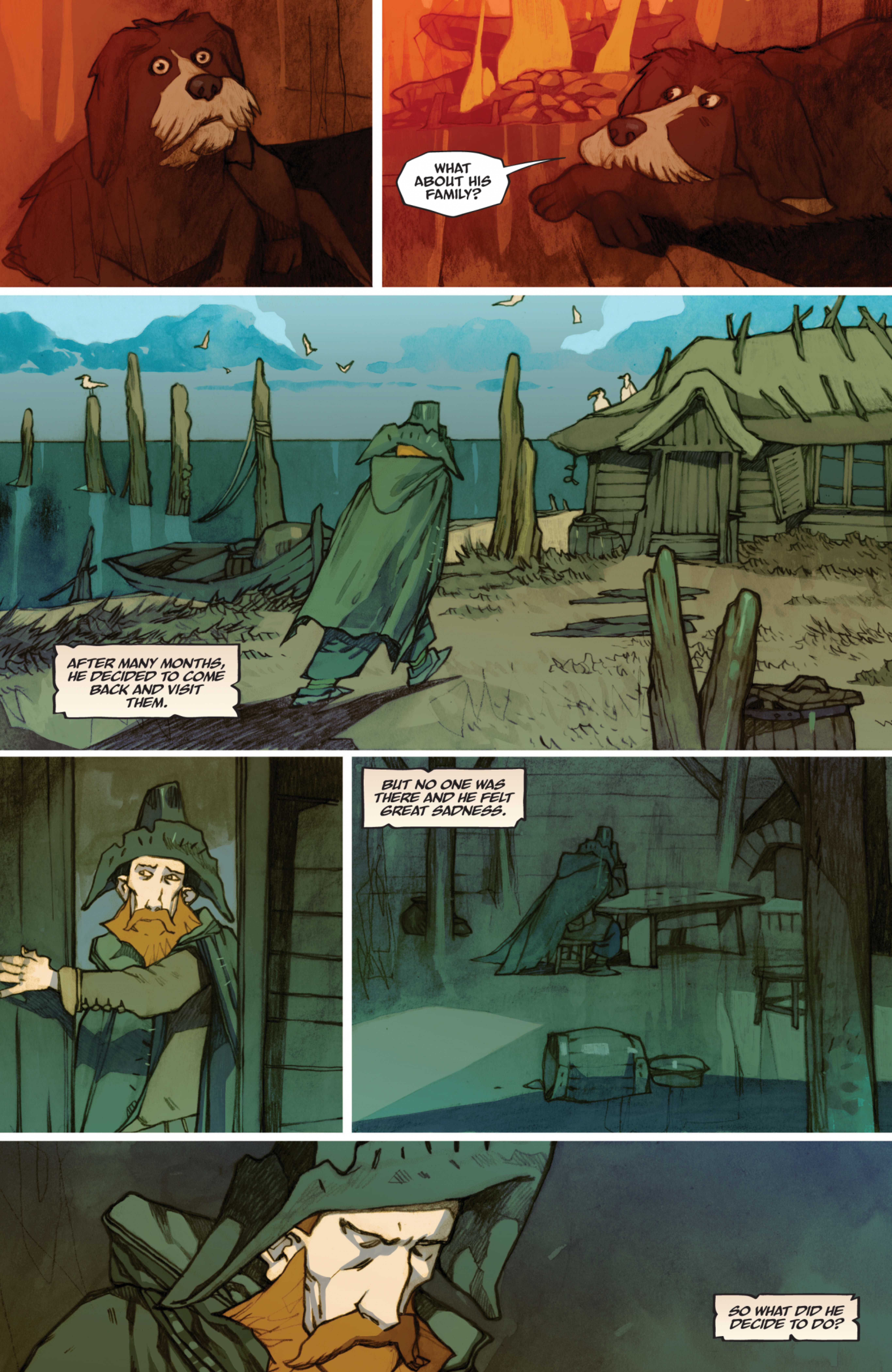

"...AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA."
THE FISHERMAN ALMOST LOST HIS HOPE.
BUT THEN HE HEARD SOMETHING.
AND HE FELT...

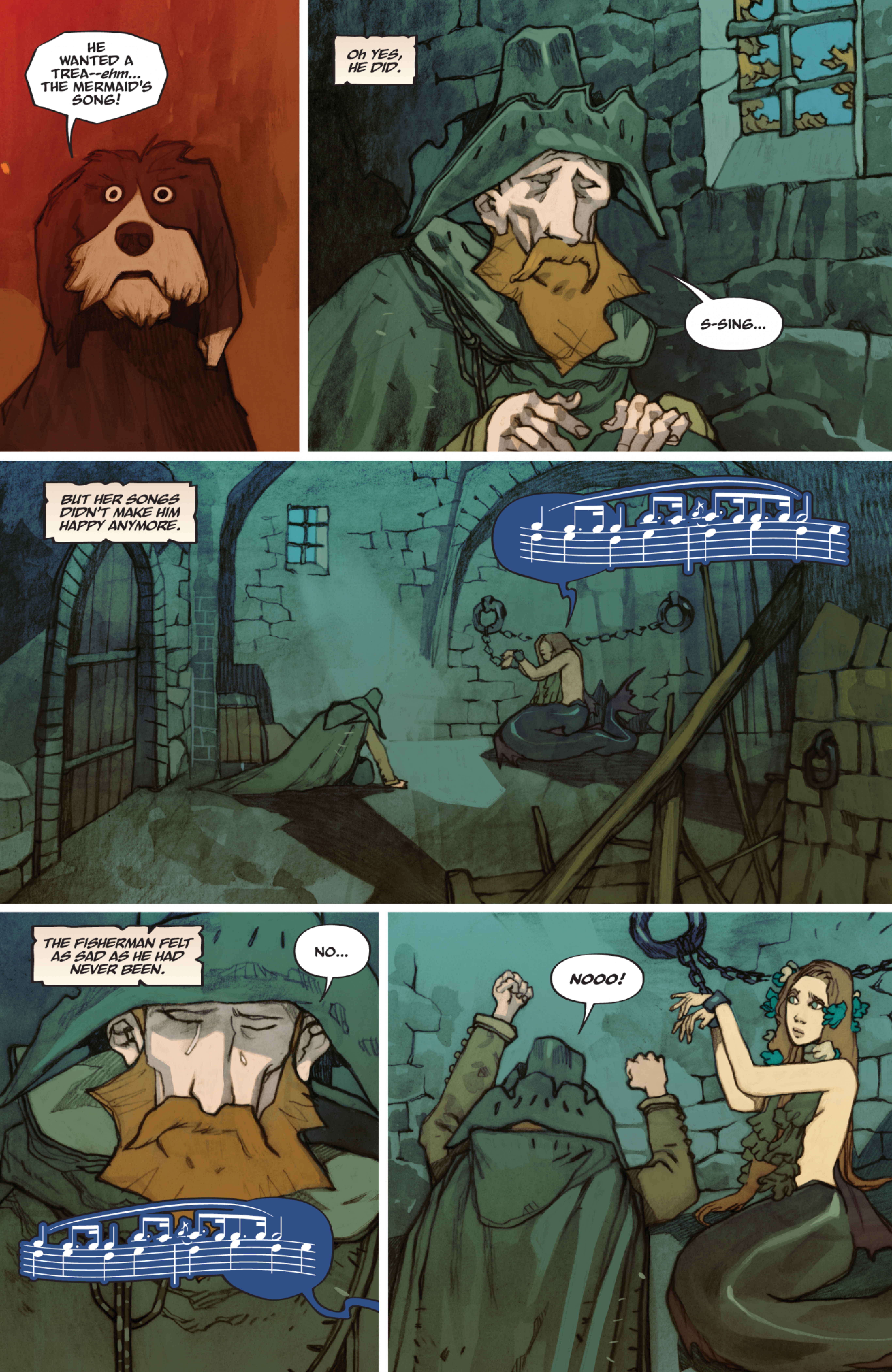

...AS HAPPY AS HE HAD NEVER BEEN.

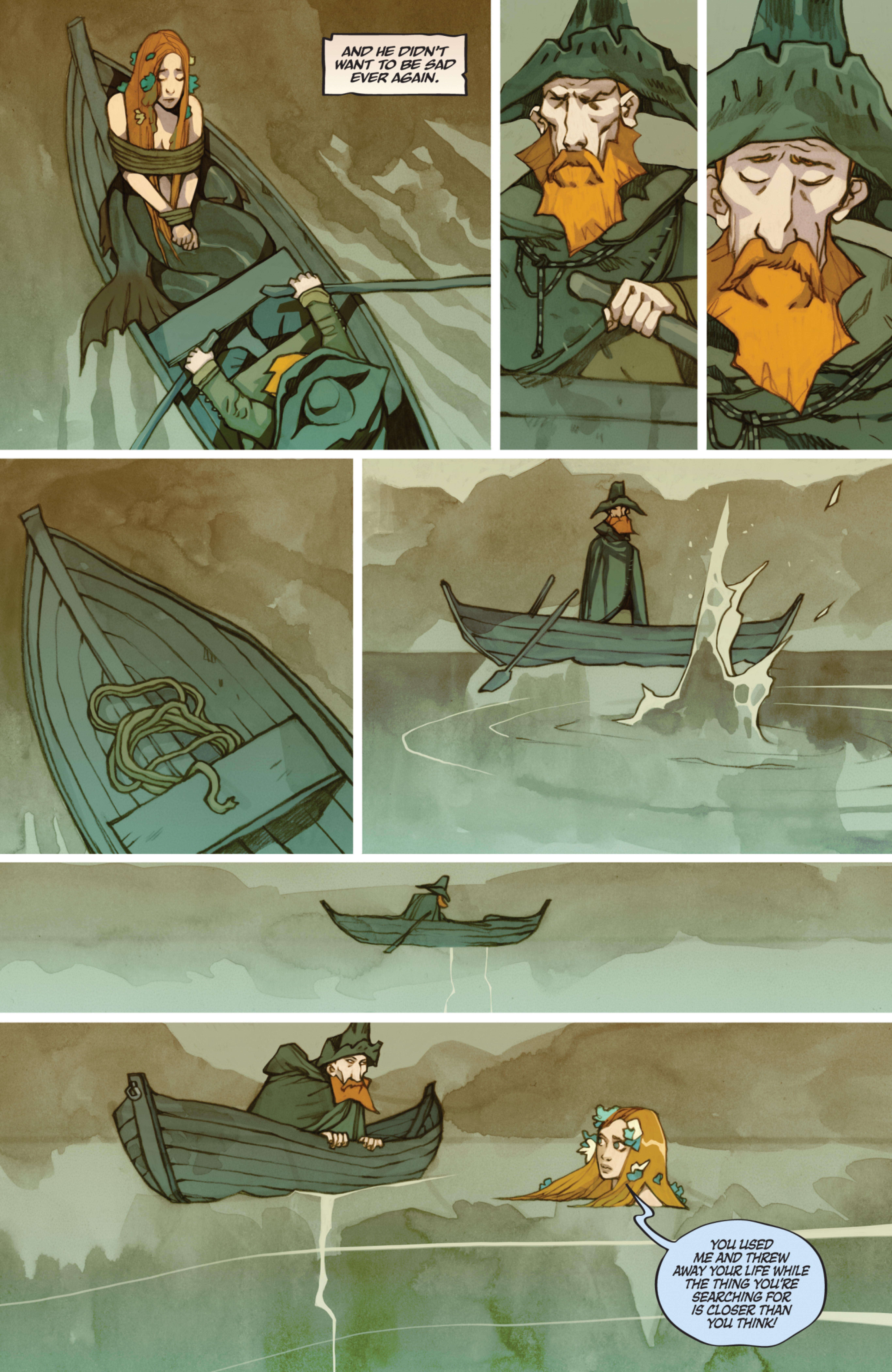

THUD
YOU'RE HOME...
I JUST CAME TO TAKE SOME FOOD.
SOMETHING HAPPENED? YOU SEEM TO BE VERY--
HAVE TO GO!
YOUR DAUGHTER NEEDS YOU!

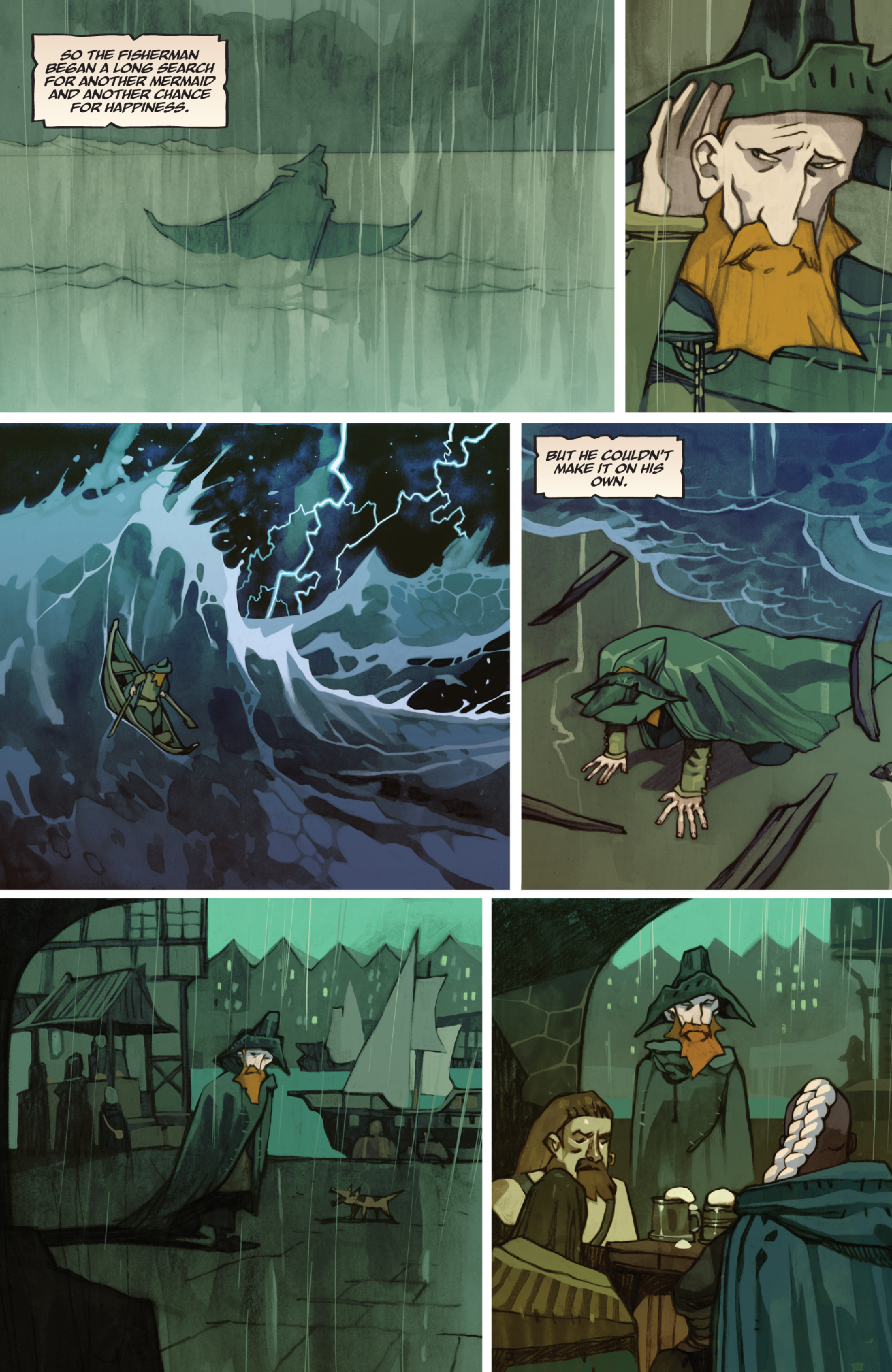

BUT THE FISHERMAN CHANGED. HE ONLY CARED ABOUT WHAT HE NEEDED.
THAT'S WHY HE WENT TO HIS SECRET PLACE.
SING!

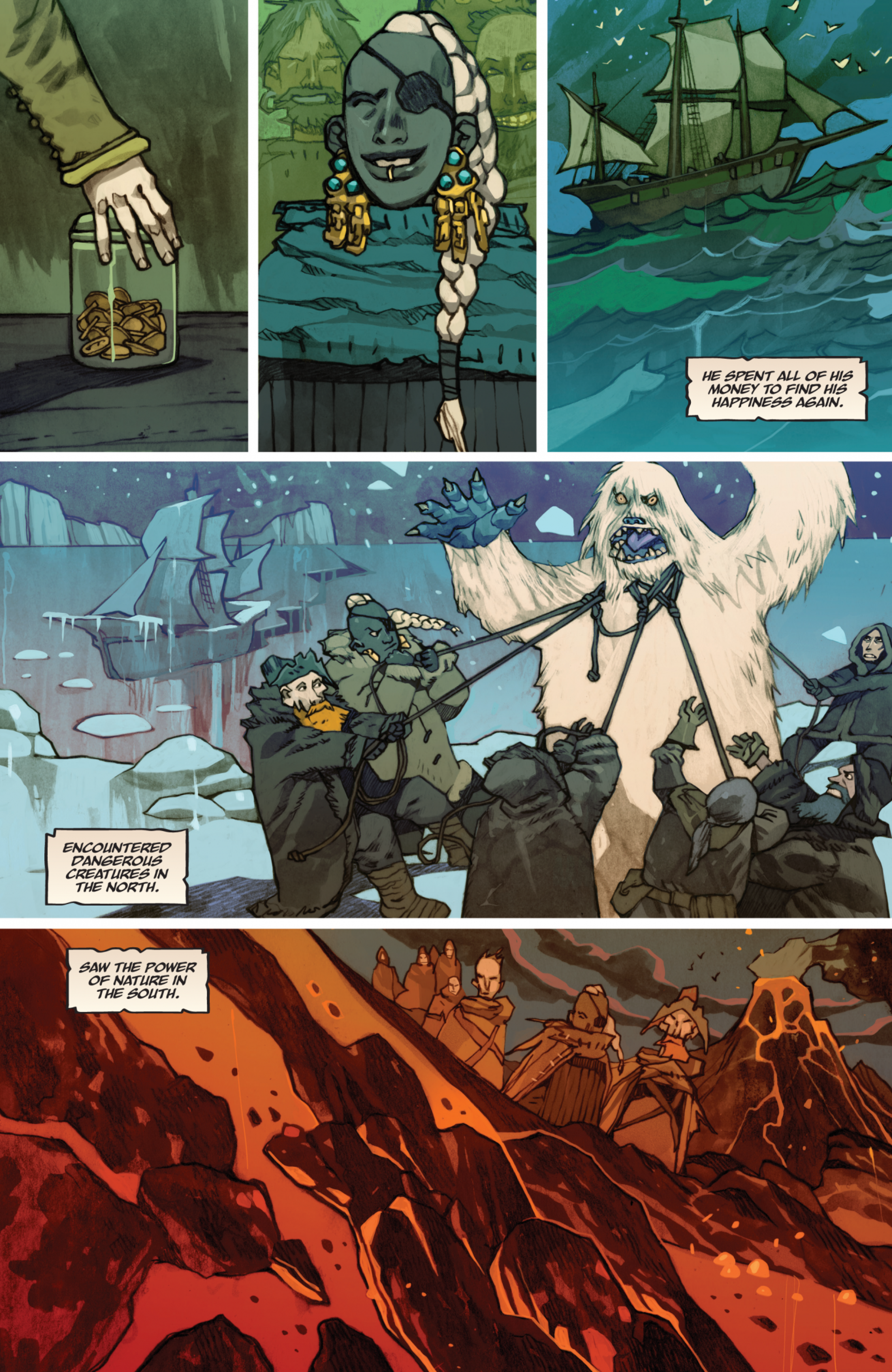

AND DID SHE SING?
Oh YES, SHE SANG ALL THE TIME.
WHEN SAD, HE LISTENED TO HER SONGS TO BE HAPPY.
WHEN HAPPY, HE USED HER TO BE HAPPIER.
AS TIME PASSED BY, THE FISHERMAN COULDN'T FEEL ANYTHING WITHOUT HER SINGING.
DOES IT REMIND YOU OF SOMEONE?

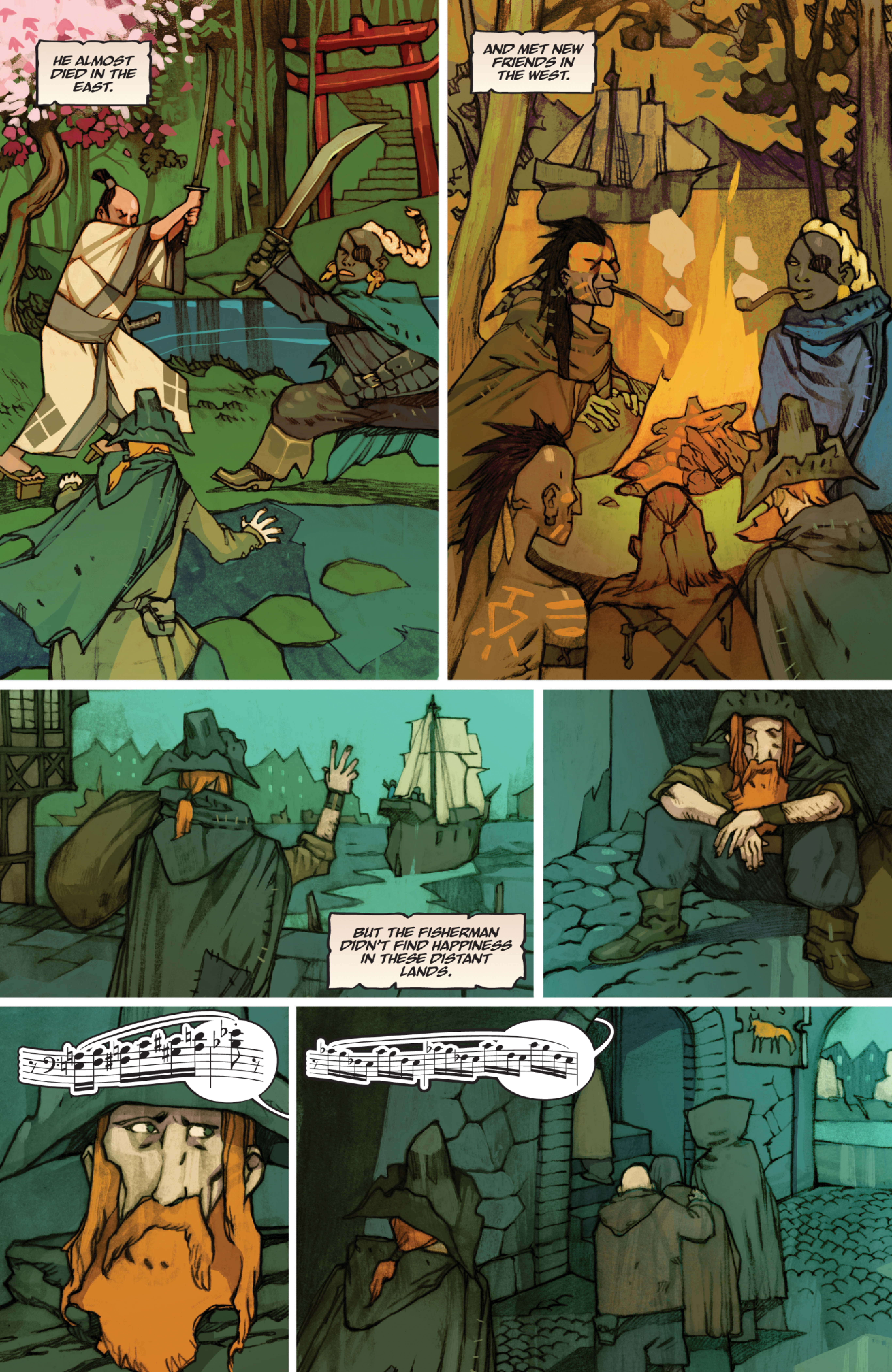

WHAT ABOUT HIS FAMILY?
AFTER MANY MONTHS, HE DECIDED TO COME BACK AND VISIT THEM.
BUT NO ONE WAS THERE AND HE FELT GREAT SADNESS.
SO WHAT DID HE DECIDE TO DO?

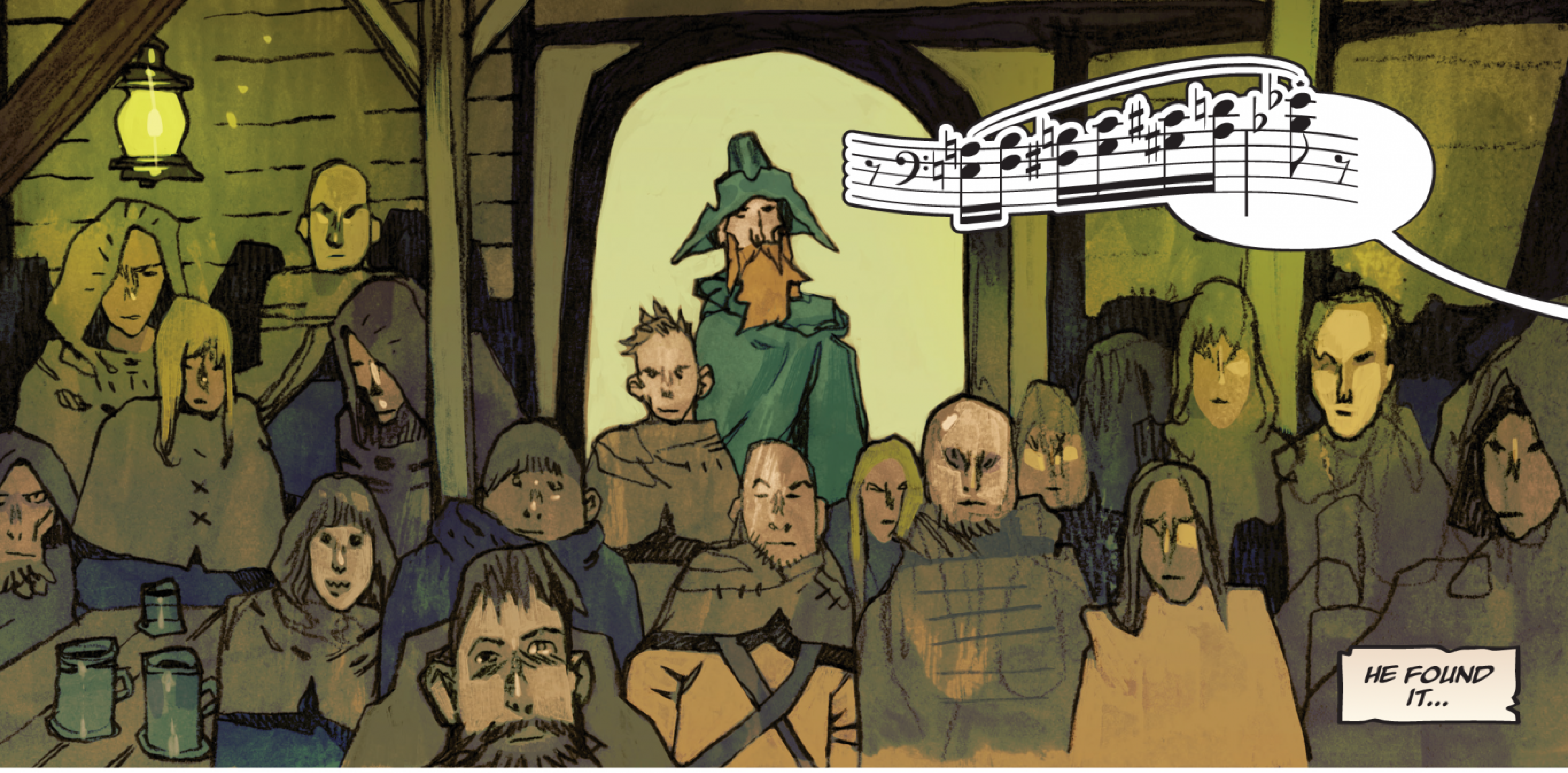

HE WANTED A TREA--*ehm*... THE MERMAID'S SONG!
Oh YES, HE DID.
S-SING...
BUT HER SONGS DIDN'T MAKE HIM HAPPY ANYMORE.
THE FISHERMAN FELT AS SAD AS HE HAD NEVER BEEN.
NO...
NOOO!

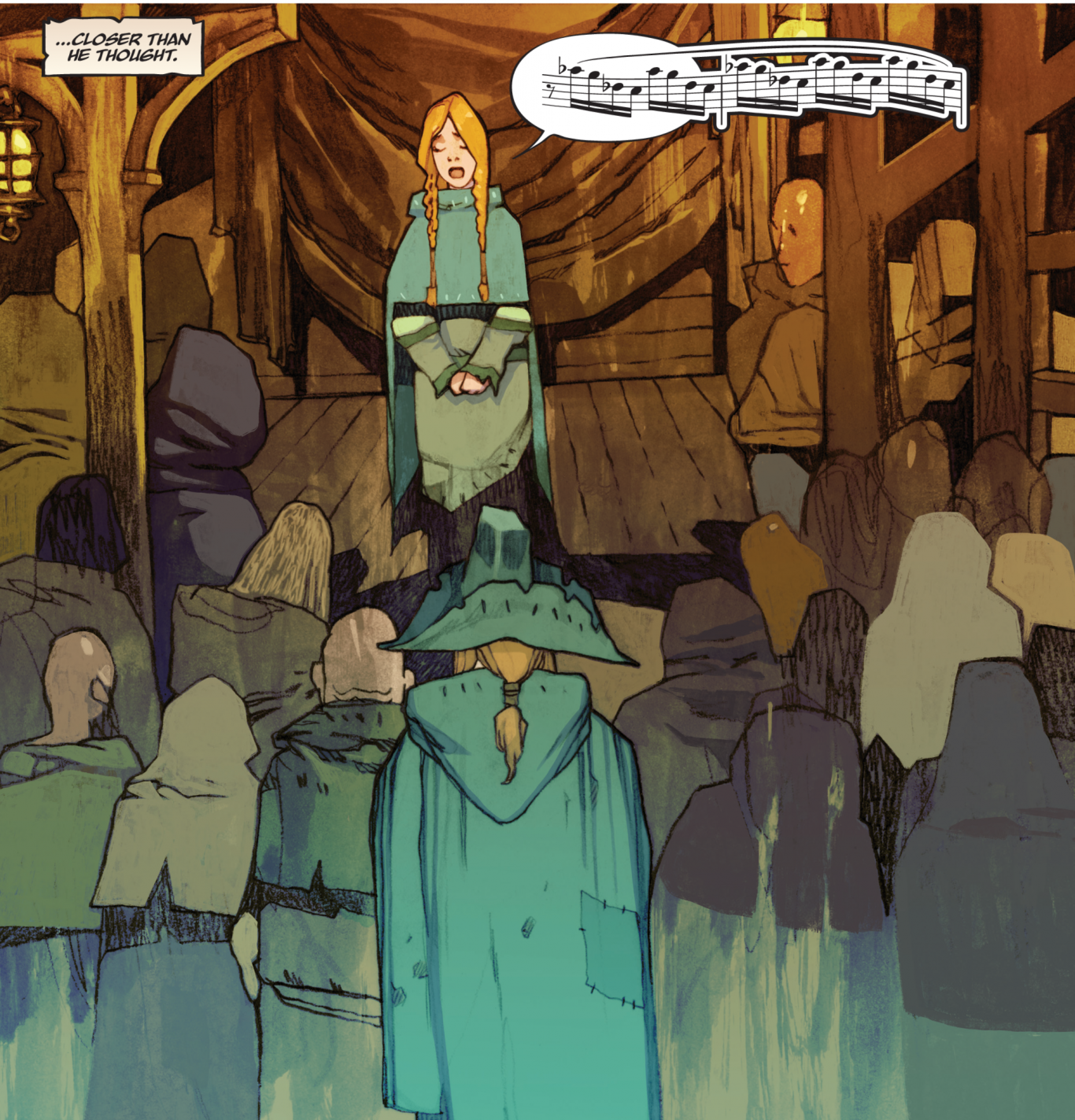

AND HE DIDN'T WANT TO BE SAD EVER AGAIN.
YOU USED ME AND THREW AWAY YOUR LIFE WHILE THE THING YOU'RE SEARCHING FOR IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK!

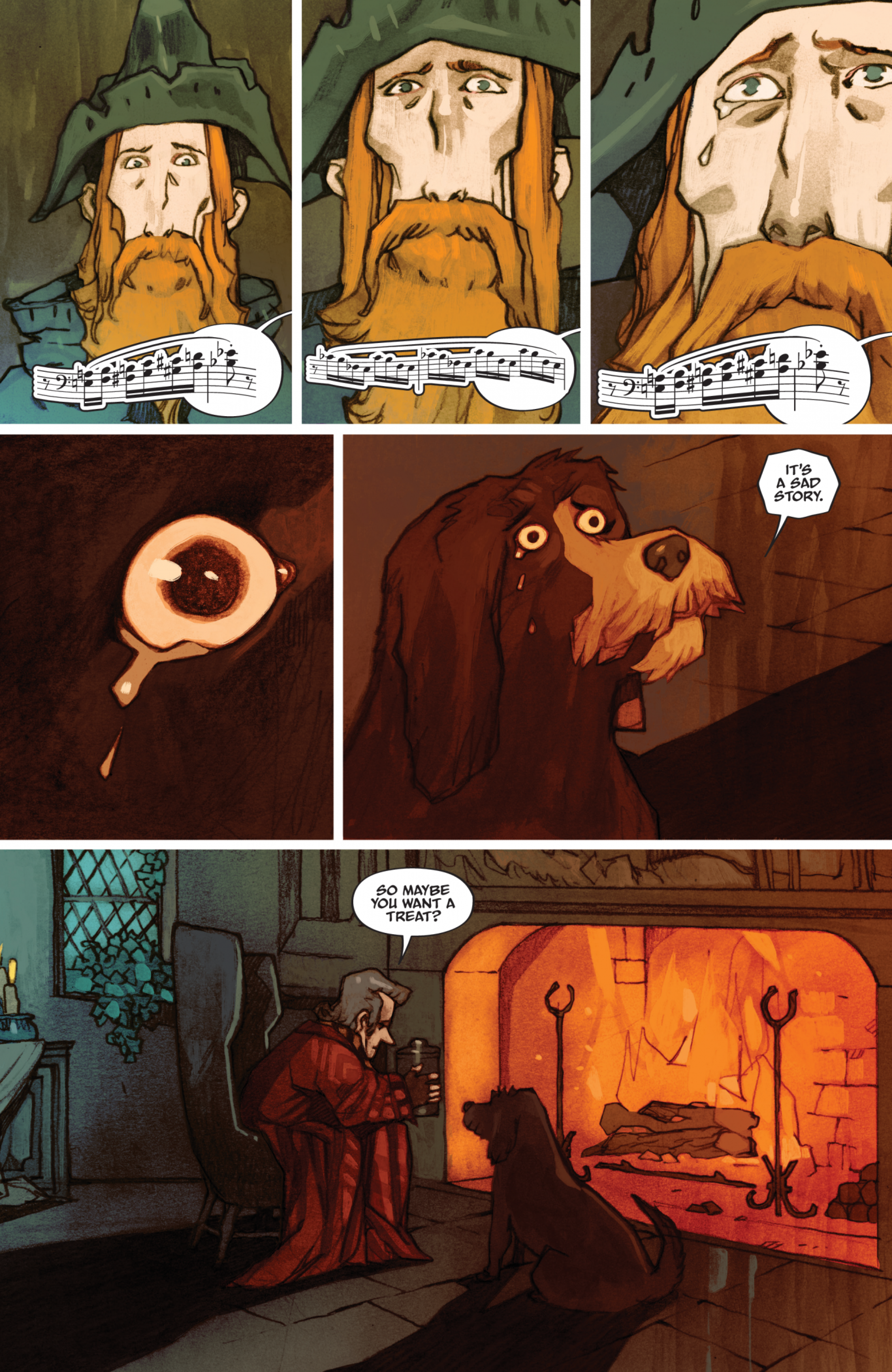

SO THE FISHERMAN BEGAN A LONG SEARCH FOR ANOTHER MERMAID AND ANOTHER CHANCE FOR HAPPINESS.
BUT HE COULDN'T MAKE IT ON HIS OWN.

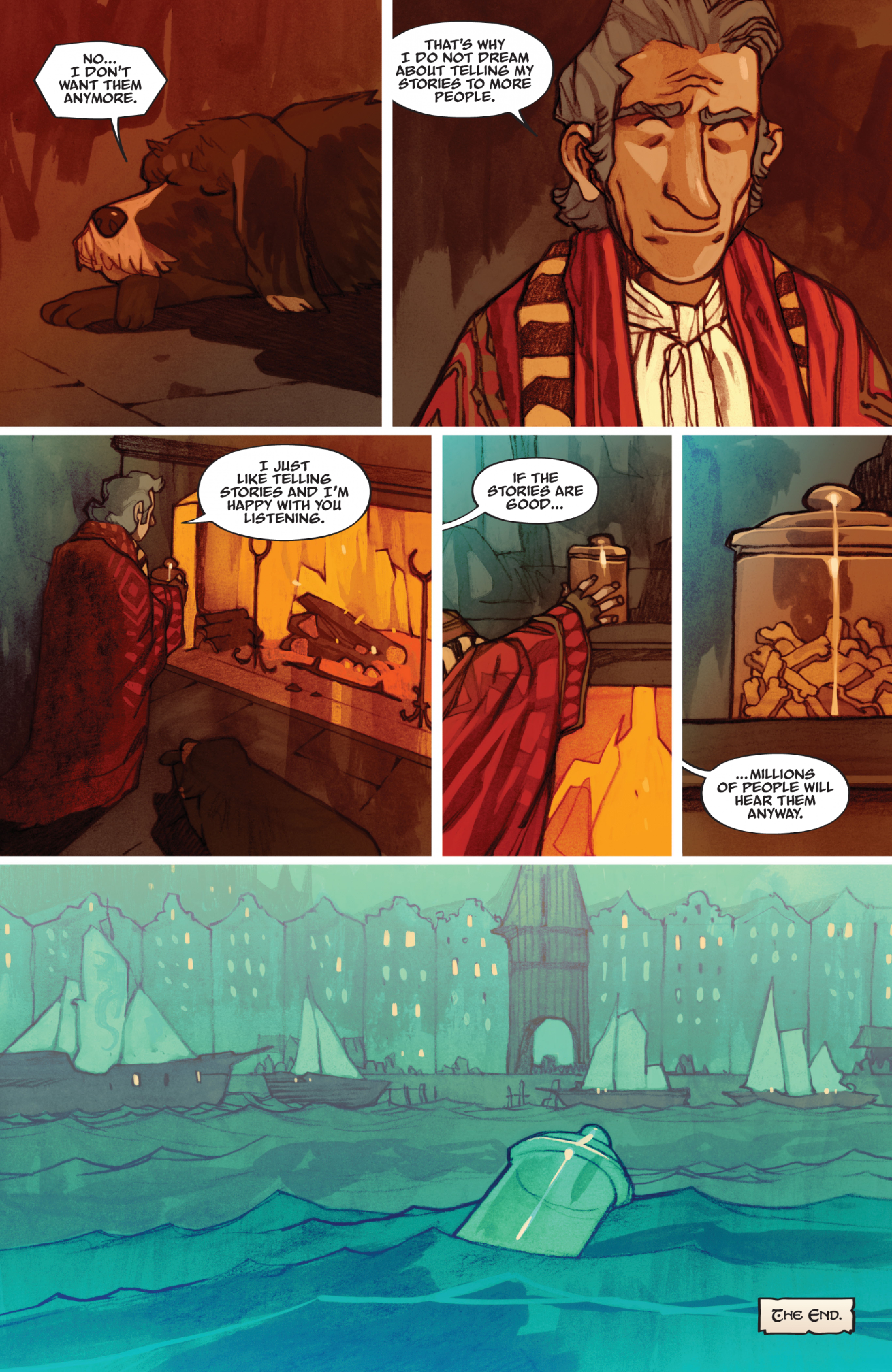

HE SPENT ALL OF HIS MONEY TO FIND HIS HAPPINESS AGAIN.
ENCOUNTERED DANGEROUS CREATURES IN THE NORTH.
SAW THE POWER OF NATURE IN THE SOUTH.


HE ALMOST DIED IN THE EAST.
AND MET NEW FRIENDS IN THE WEST.
BUT THE FISHERMAN DIDN'T FIND HAPPINESS IN THESE DISTANT LANDS.


HE FOUND IT...


...CLOSER THAN HE THOUGHT.


IT'S A SAD STORY.
SO MAYBE YOU WANT A TREAT?


NO... I DON'T WANT THEM ANYMORE.
THAT'S WHY I DO NOT DREAM ABOUT TELLING MY STORIES TO MORE PEOPLE.
I JUST LIKE TELLING STORIES AND I'M HAPPY WITH YOU LISTENING.
IF THE STORIES ARE GOOD...
...MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WILL HEAR THEM ANYWAY.
THE END.

TALE TWO COVER

CHAN CHAU

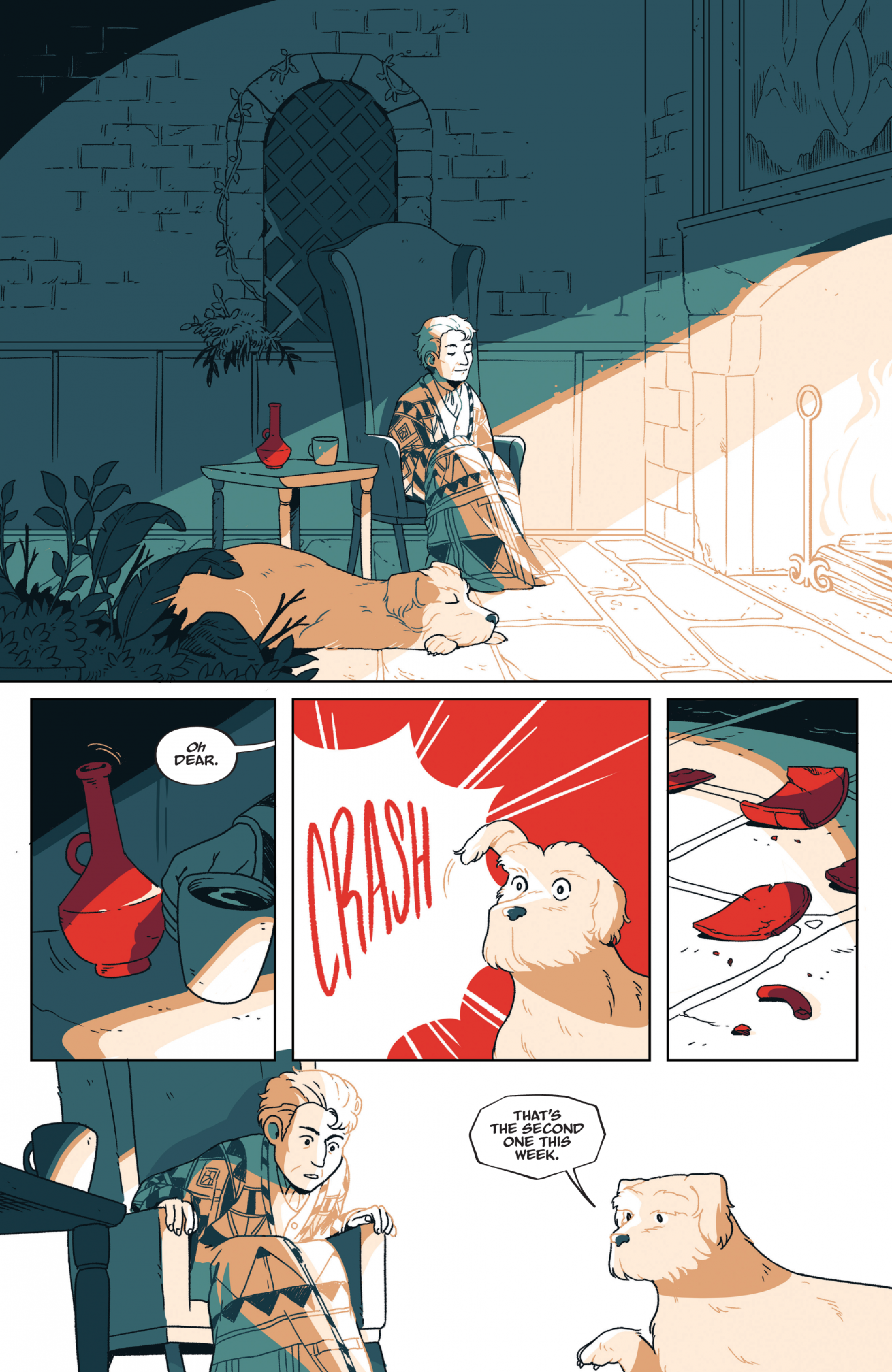
EMPRESS WA

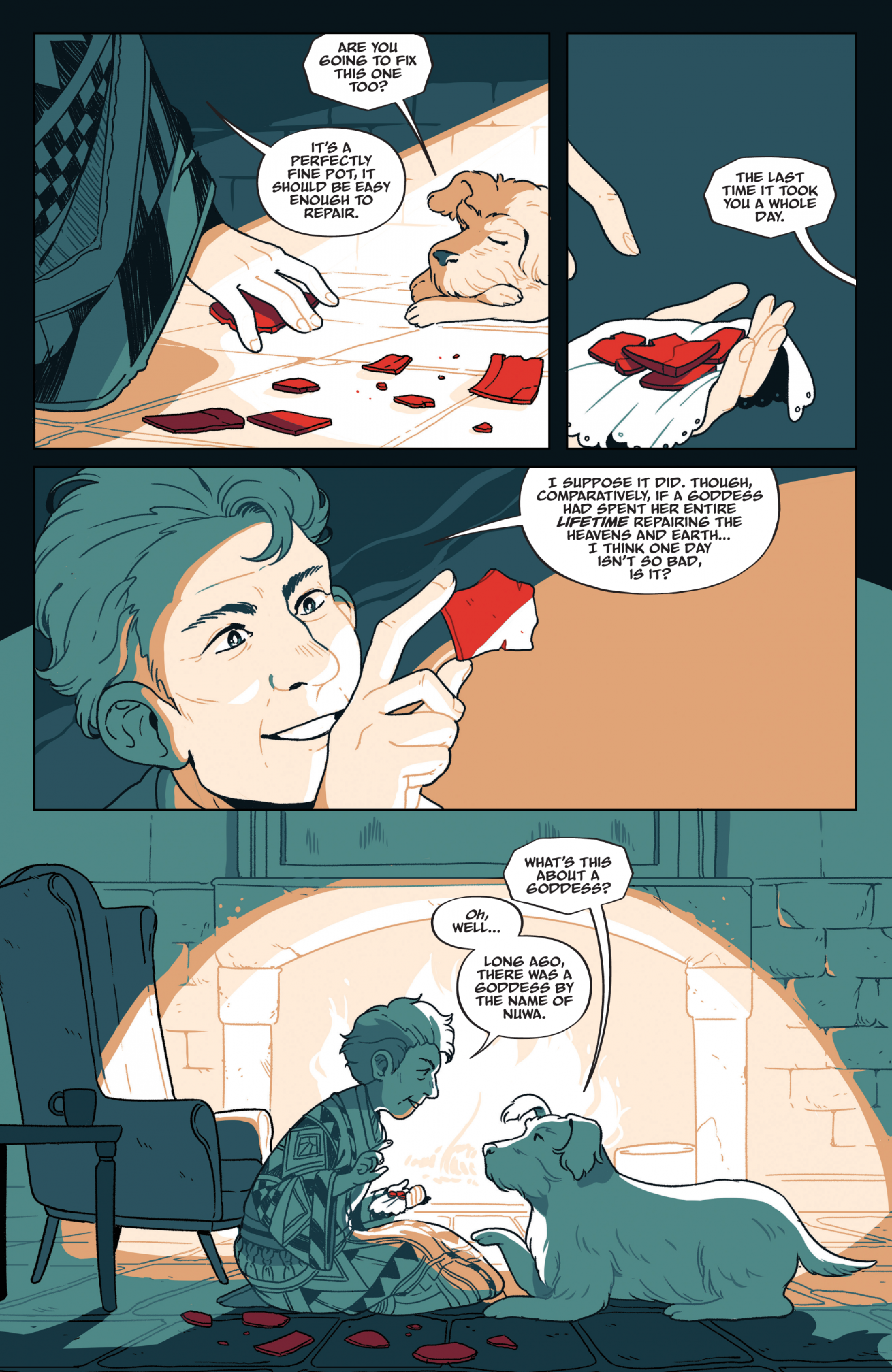
Throughout European and Asian storytelling traditions, there are plenty of myths about mermaids and sirens. However, the more I researched, the more the Chinese tale about a goddess with a serpent-like body stood out to me. Besides the fact that this story has ties to my personal heritage, I chose to retell the tale of the goddess Nuwa because of the unique opportunity it presented to subvert the typical idea of what a siren is understood to be in Western culture. It is a tale that instead poses a softer and more nuanced look at mermaid mythology.

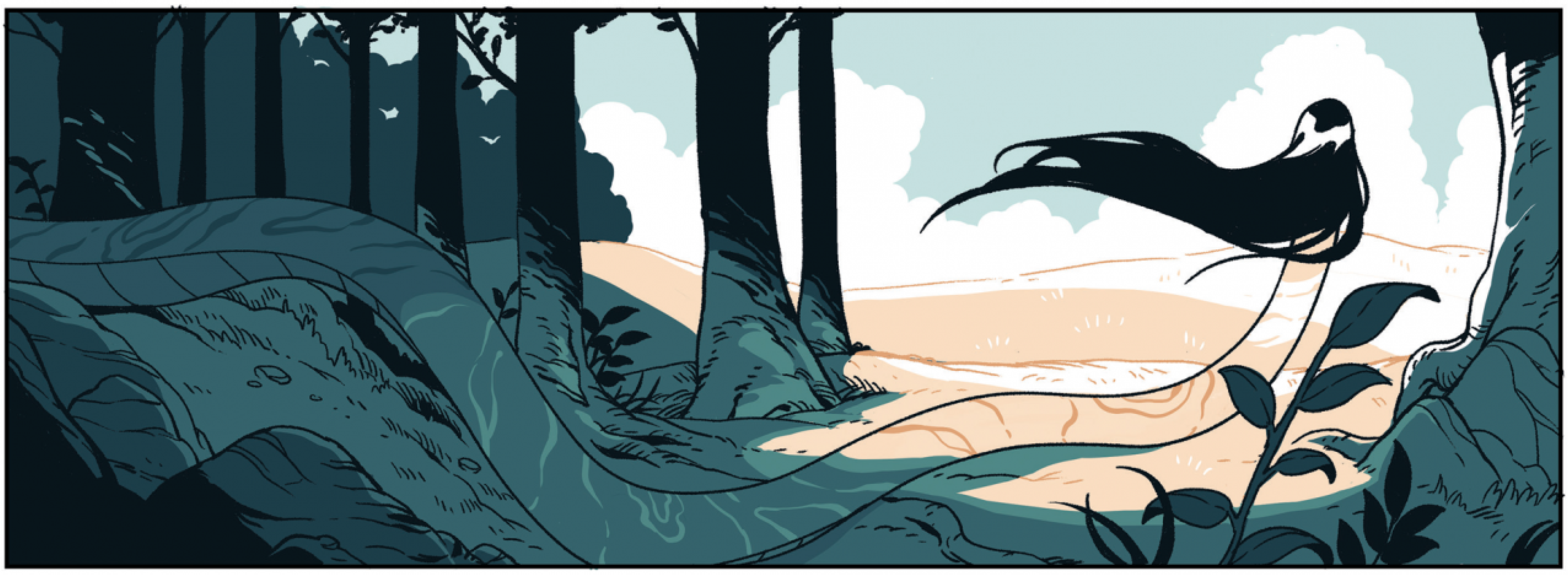
The pitch for this particular comic came easily, as there's very little variance in the different versions of the story. In all tales, Nuwa the goddess was known to have a close relationship with humans and took it upon herself to protect them with every ounce of her being. It is an incredibly hopeful mythology that promotes creativity, hard work, learning from the past, and gracefully bearing the responsibility of your mistakes and those of others. It also carries a strong message of working smarter rather than harder and incorporates subtle feminist themes that are still extremely relevant today.

In my retelling, I chose to focus on the relationship between Nuwa and her first human, both of whom wear red throughout the comic. My editor and I were greatly interested in the goddess' emotional connection to her creations, particularly by spotlighting a human she was proud of, and someone whom the reader can relate to. Along with the minimal color scheme I chose, this additional visual narrative helped tie the story together in a neat bow.

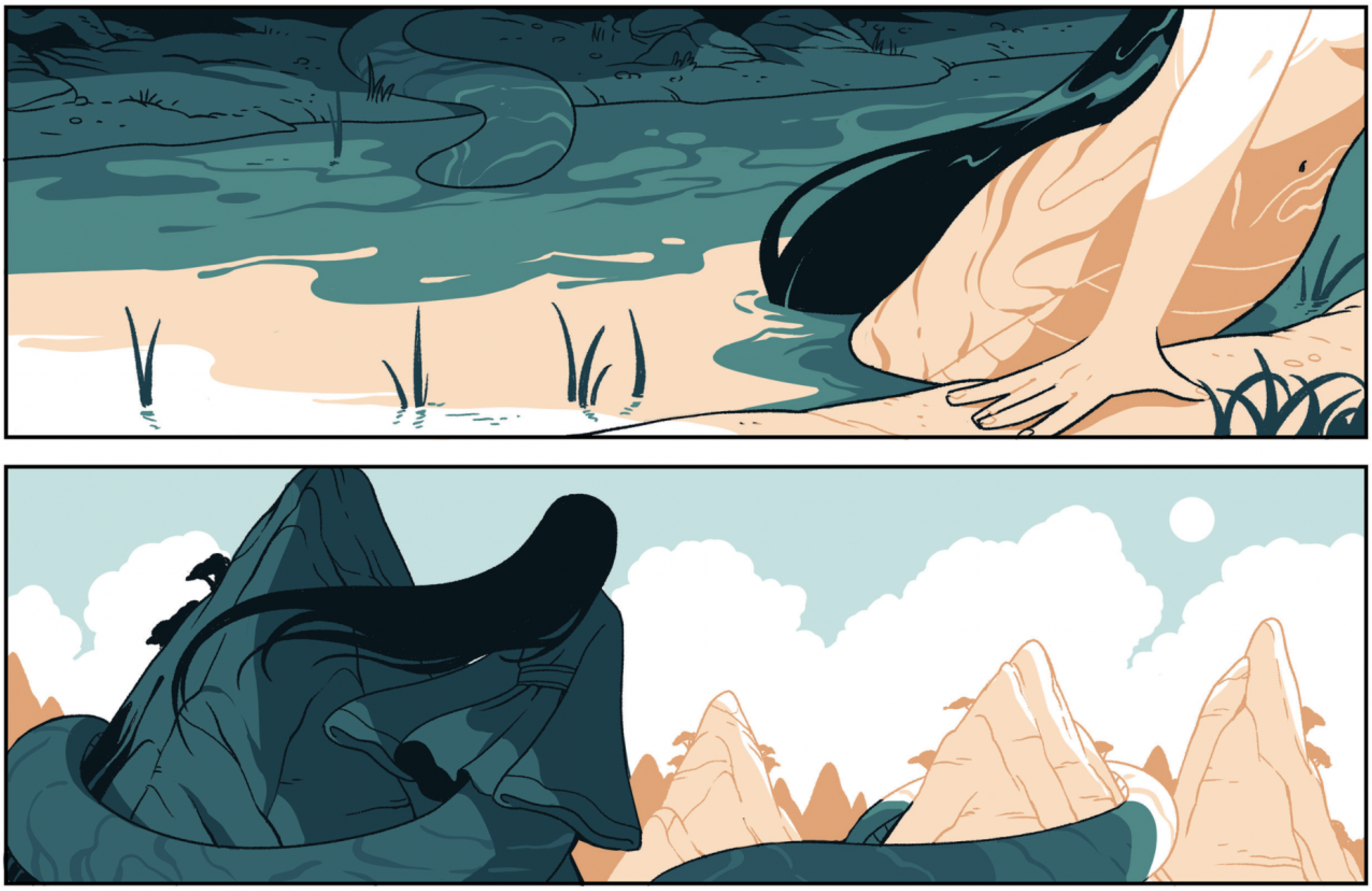
– Chan Chau


Oh DEAR.
CRASH
THAT'S THE SECOND ONE THIS WEEK.

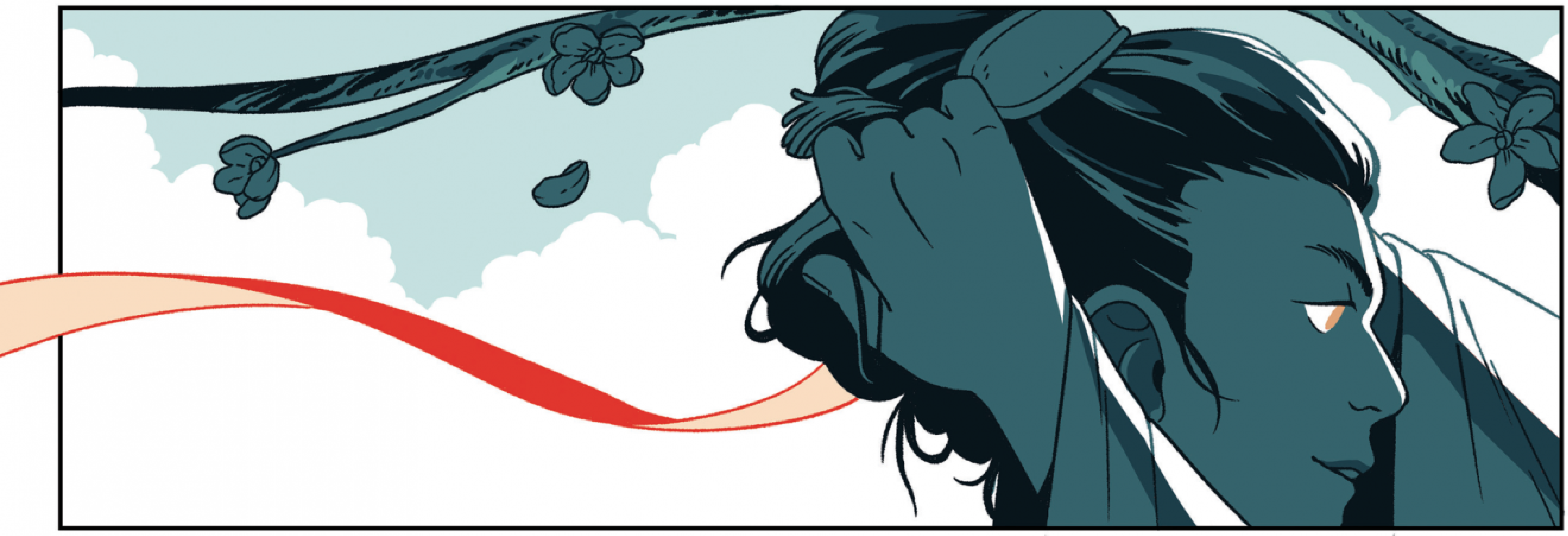

IT'S A PERFECTLY FINE POT, IT SHOULD BE EASY ENOUGH TO REPAIR.
ARE YOU GOING TO FIX THIS ONE TOO?
THE LAST TIME IT TOOK YOU A WHOLE DAY.
I SUPPOSE IT DID. THOUGH, COMPARATIVELY, IF A GODDESS HAD SPENT HER ENTIRE *LIFETIME* REPAIRING THE HEAVENS AND EARTH... I THINK ONE DAY ISN'T SO BAD, IS IT?
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A GODDESS?
Oh, WELL...
LONG AGO, THERE WAS A GODDESS BY THE NAME OF NUWA.

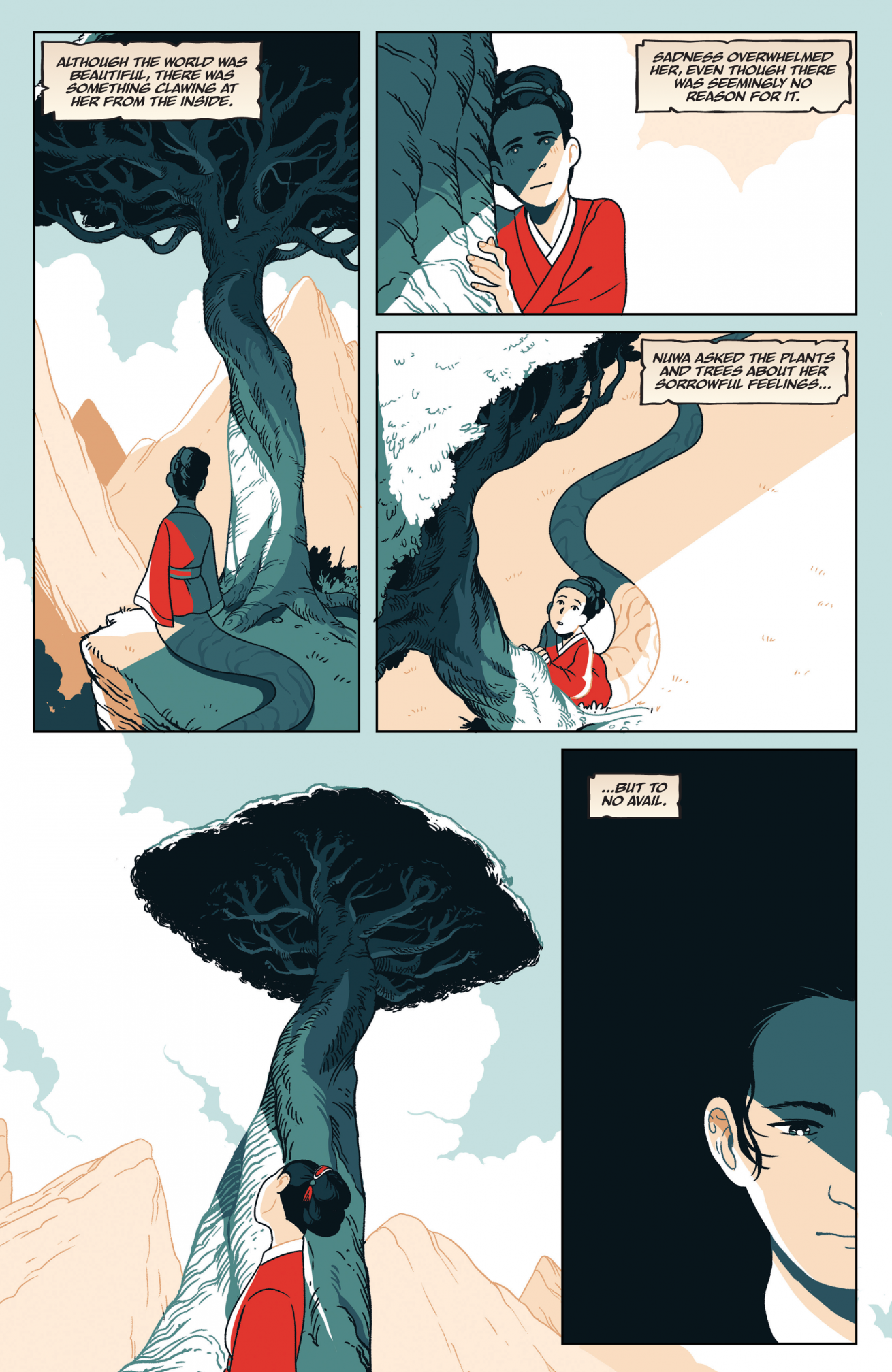


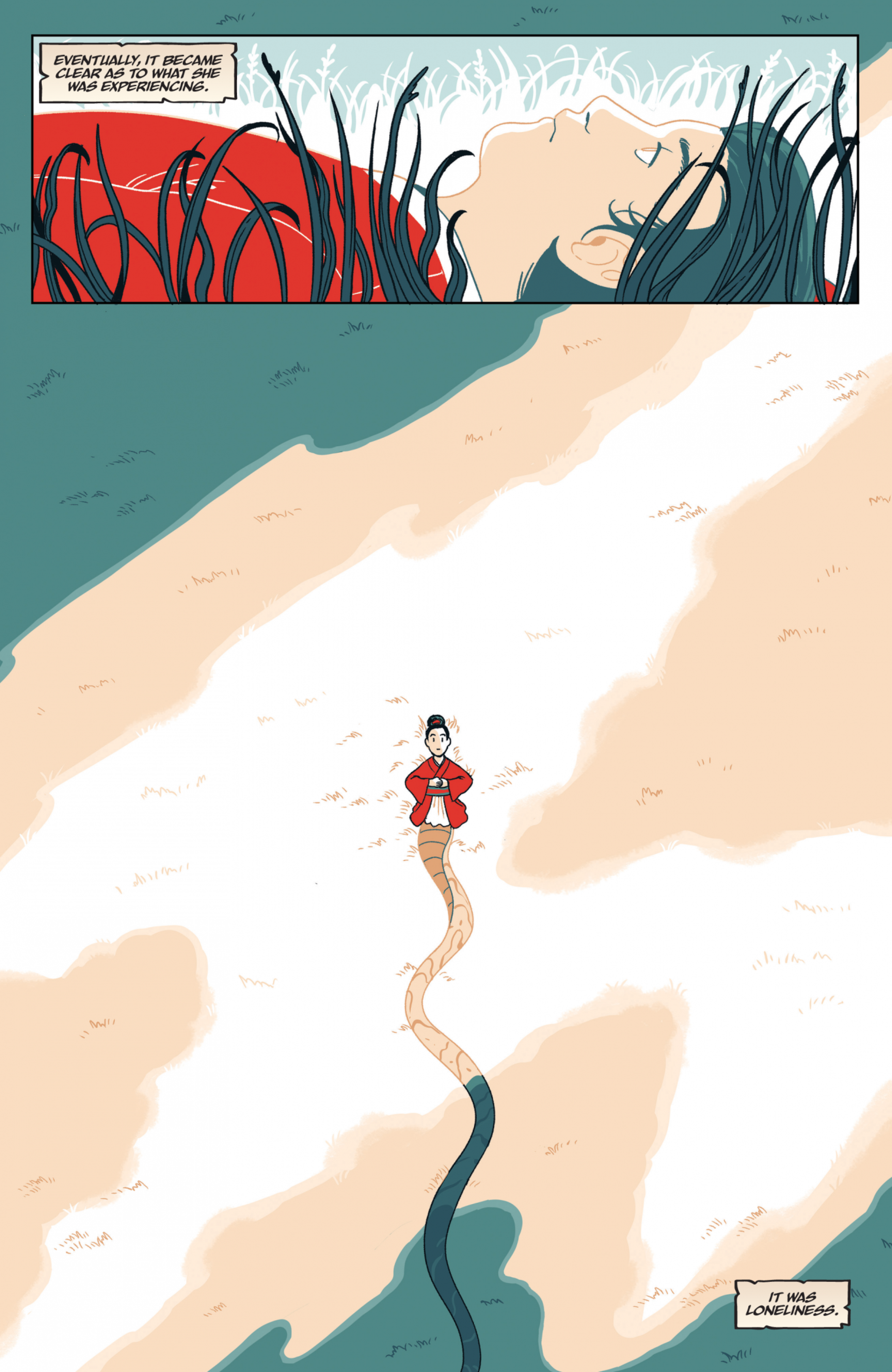
NUWA HAD THE BODY OF A SNAKE AND THE HEAD OF A BEAUTIFUL EMPRESS, BUT SHE COULD CHANGE HER FORM WHENEVER SHE PLEASED.

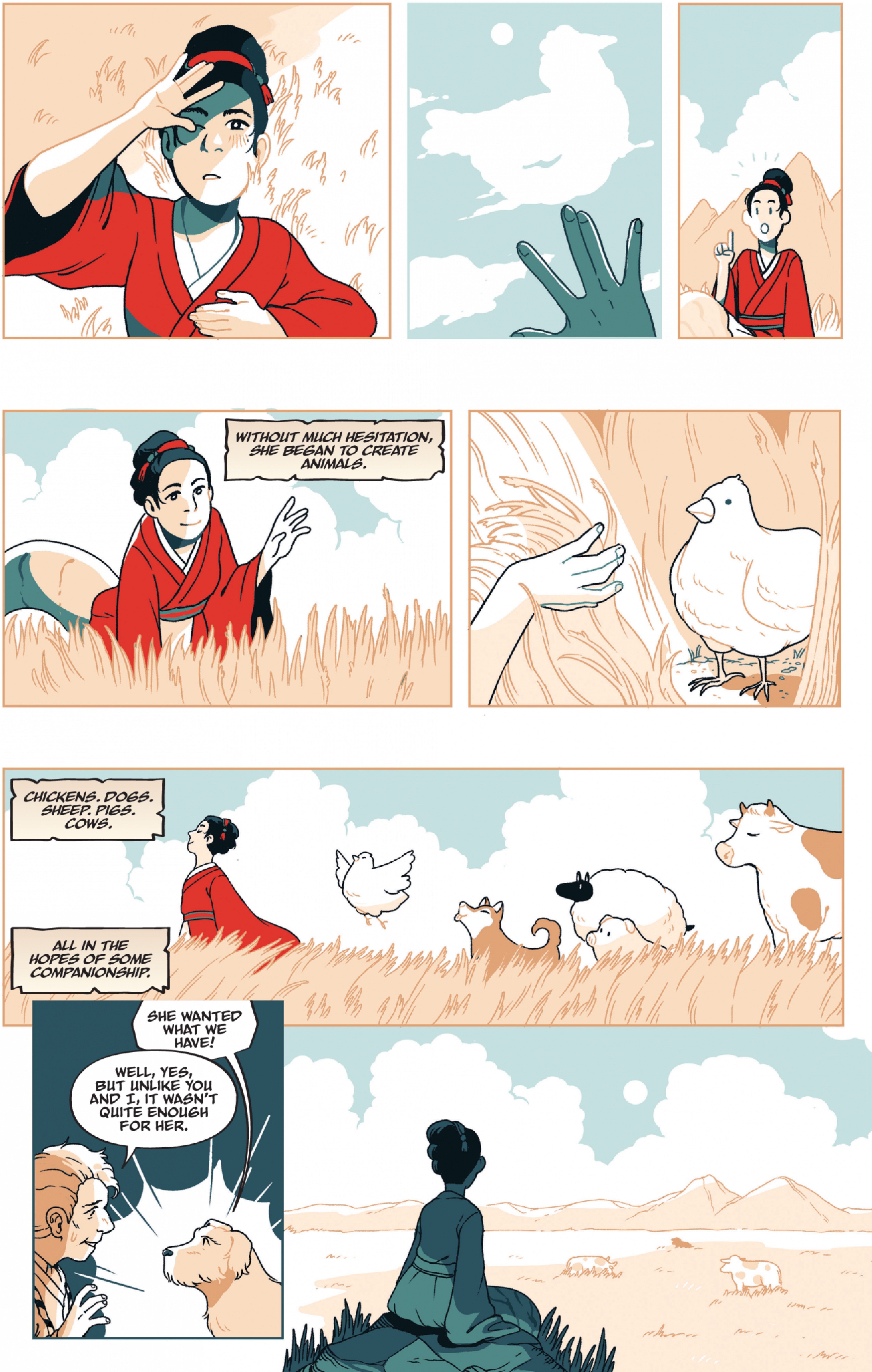


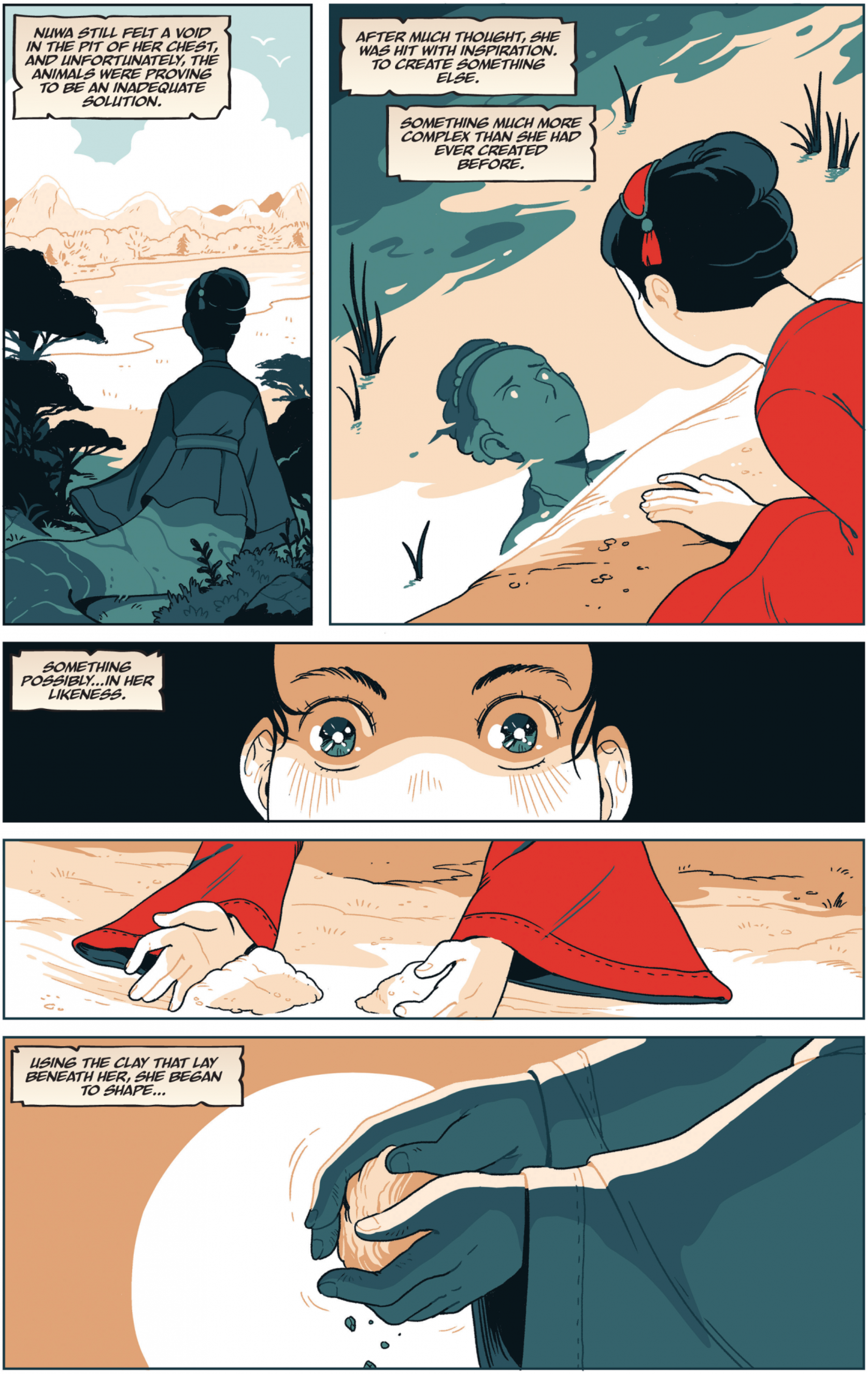
SHE TRAVELED THROUGHOUT THE LANDS, SURVEYING THE BEGINNINGS OF THIS WORLD AND WATCHING AS ITS LIFE BLOSSOMED.

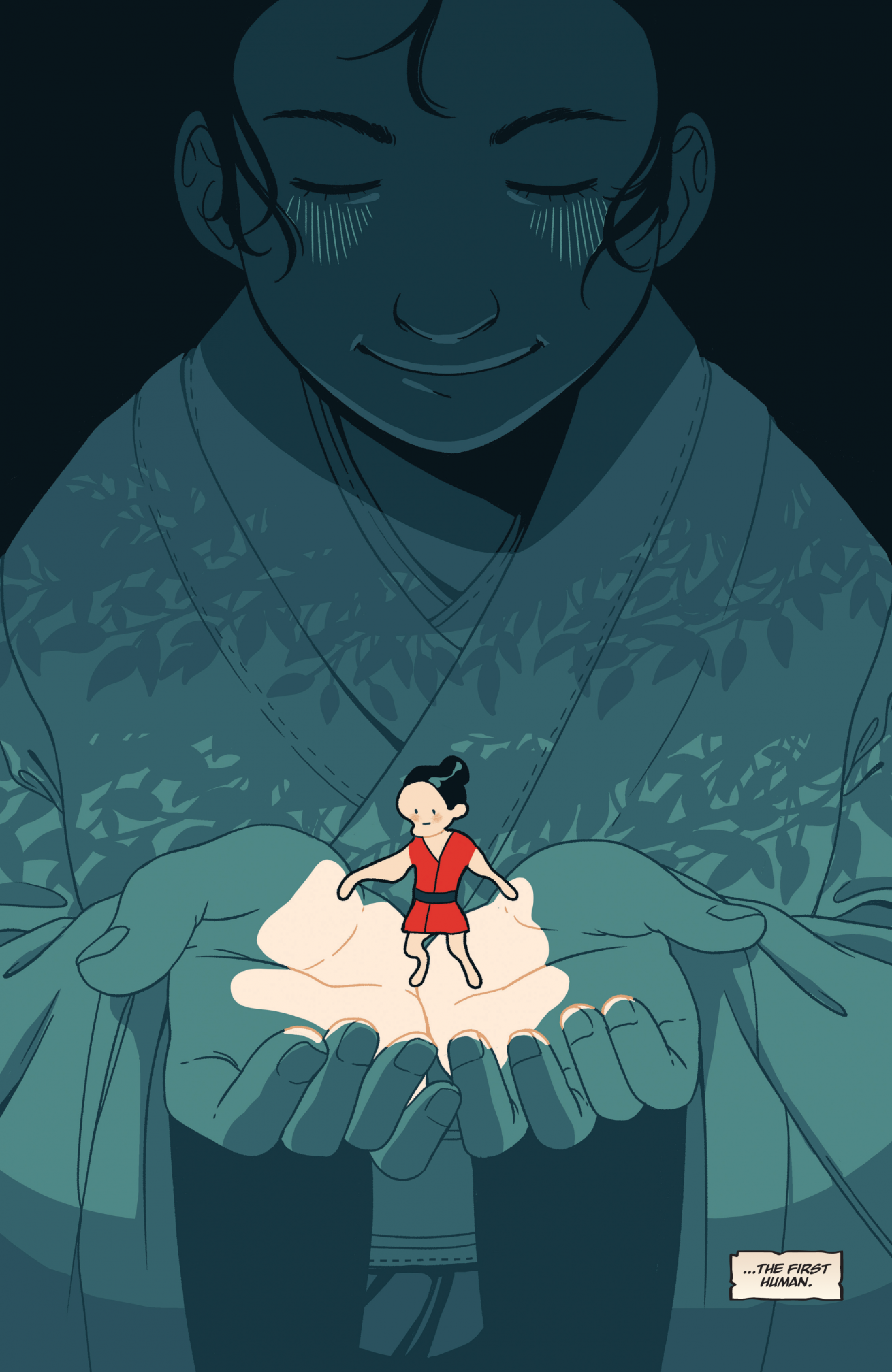


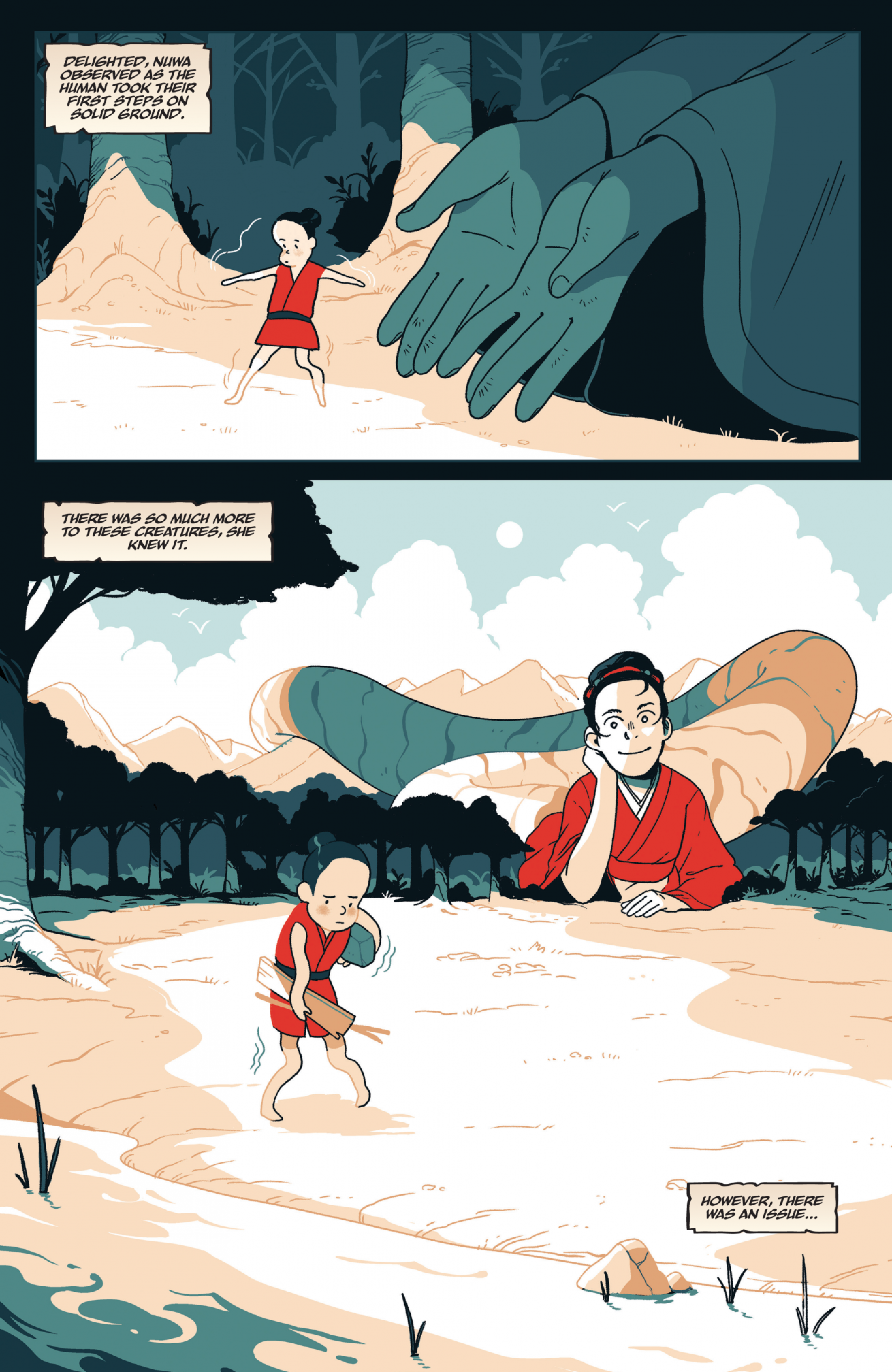

ALTHOUGH THE WORLD WAS BEAUTIFUL, THERE WAS SOMETHING CLAWING AT HER FROM THE INSIDE.
SADNESS OVERWHELMED HER, EVEN THOUGH THERE WAS SEEMINGLY NO REASON FOR IT.
NUWA ASKED THE PLANTS AND TREES ABOUT HER SORROWFUL FEELINGS...
...BUT TO NO AVAIL.

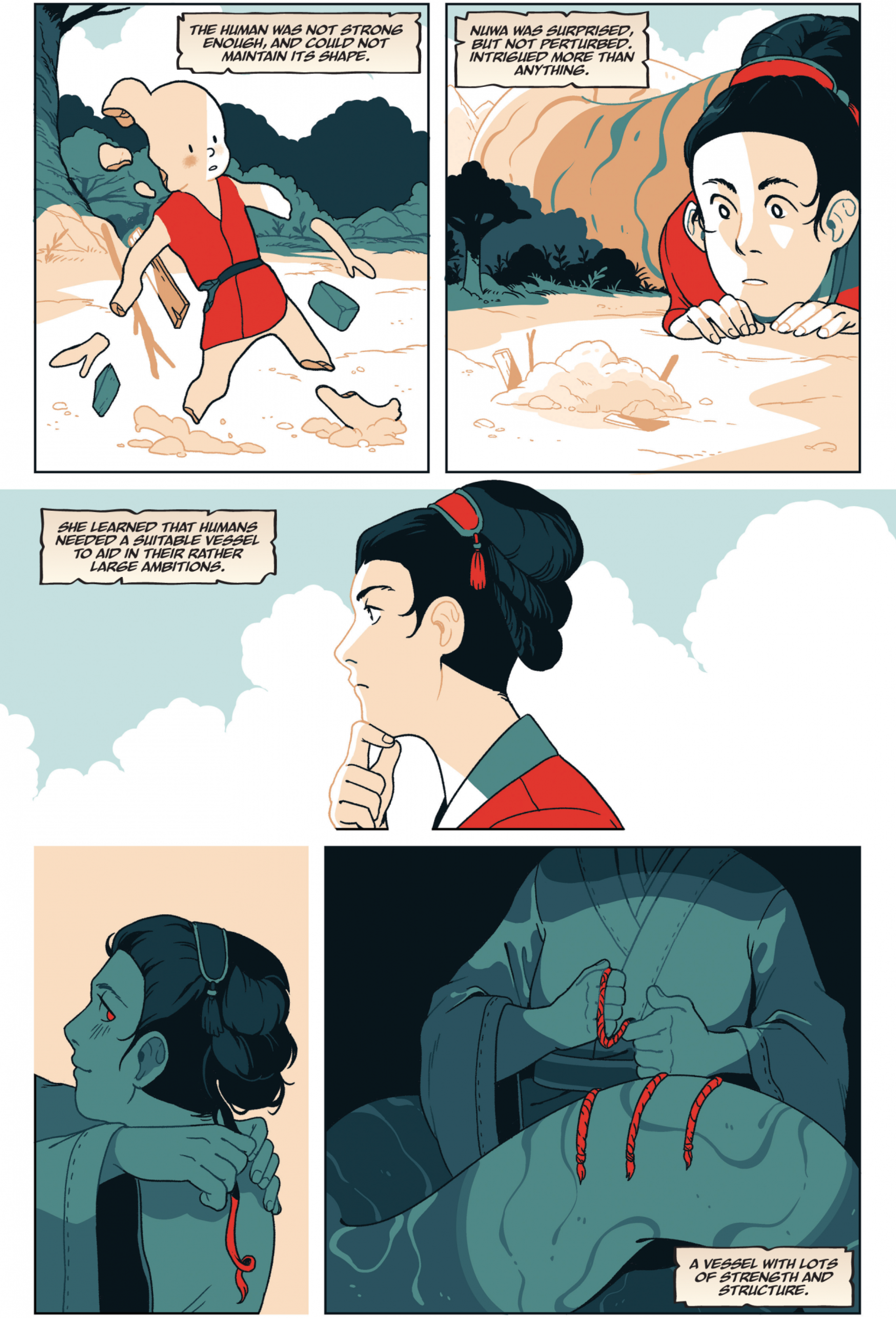

EVENTUALLY, IT BECAME CLEAR AS TO WHAT SHE WAS EXPERIENCING.
IT WAS LONELINESS.

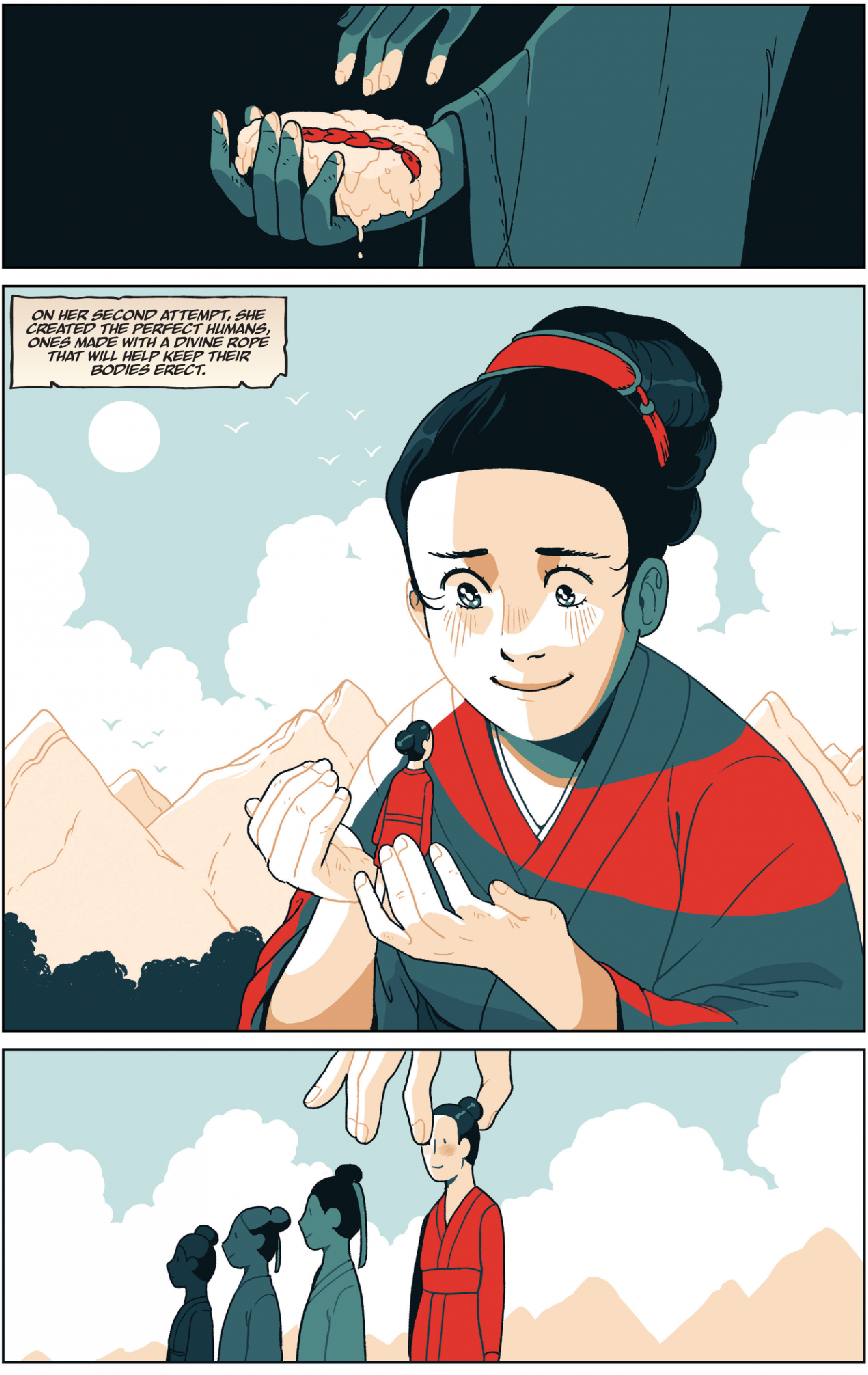

WITHOUT MUCH HESITATION, SHE BEGAN TO CREATE ANIMALS.
CHICKENS. DOGS. SHEEP. PIGS. COWS.
ALL IN THE HOPES OF SOME COMPANIONSHIP.
SHE WANTED WHAT WE HAVE!
WELL, YES, BUT UNLIKE YOU AND I, IT WASN'T QUITE ENOUGH FOR HER.

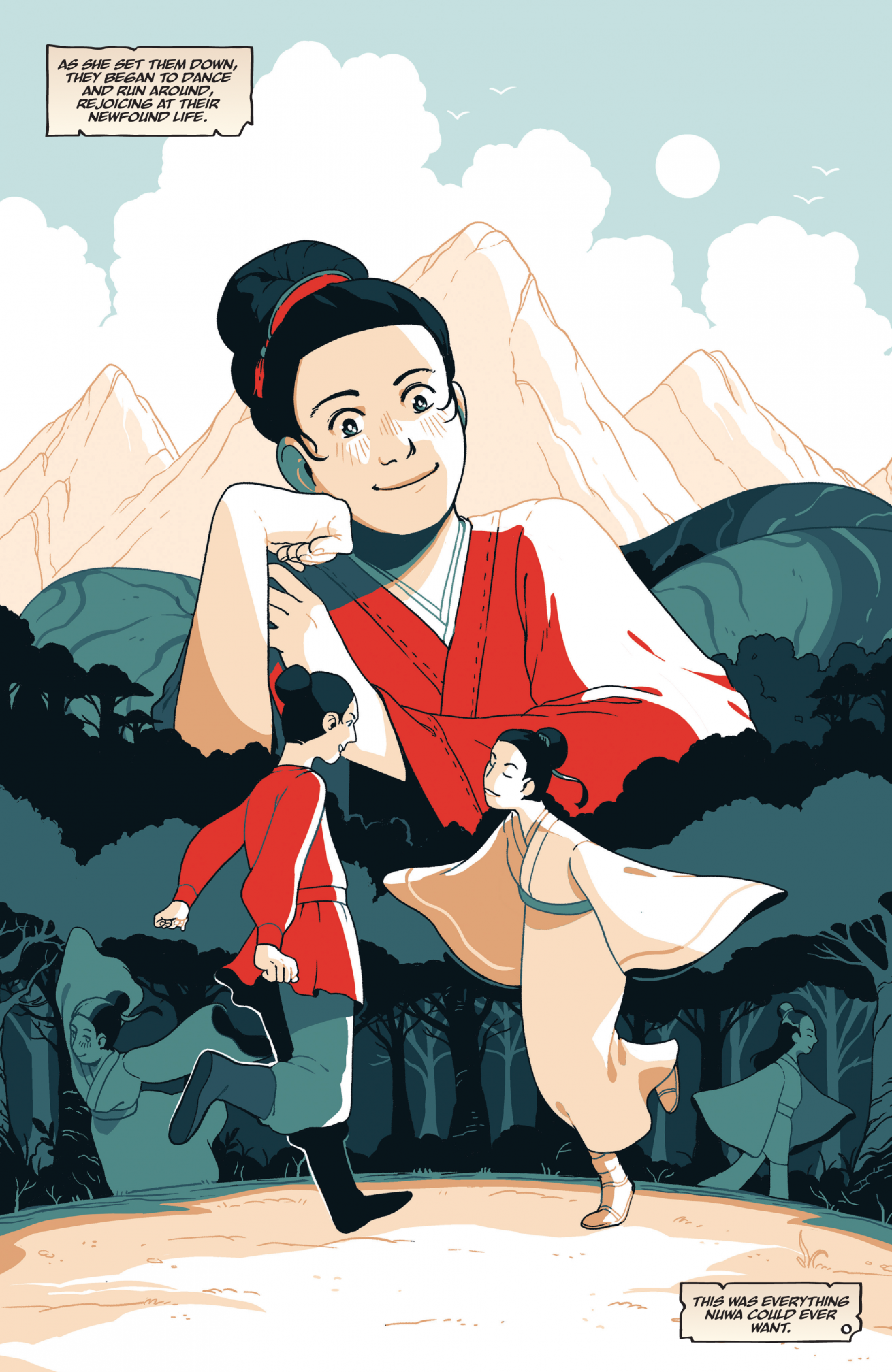

NUWA STILL FELT A VOID IN THE PIT OF HER CHEST, AND UNFORTUNATELY, THE ANIMALS WERE PROVING TO BE AN INADEQUATE SOLUTION.
AFTER MUCH THOUGHT, SHE WAS HIT WITH INSPIRATION. TO CREATE SOMETHING ELSE.
SOMETHING MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN SHE HAD EVER CREATED BEFORE.
SOMETHING POSSIBLY...IN HER LIKENESS.
USING THE CLAY THAT LAY BENEATH HER, SHE BEGAN TO SHAPE...

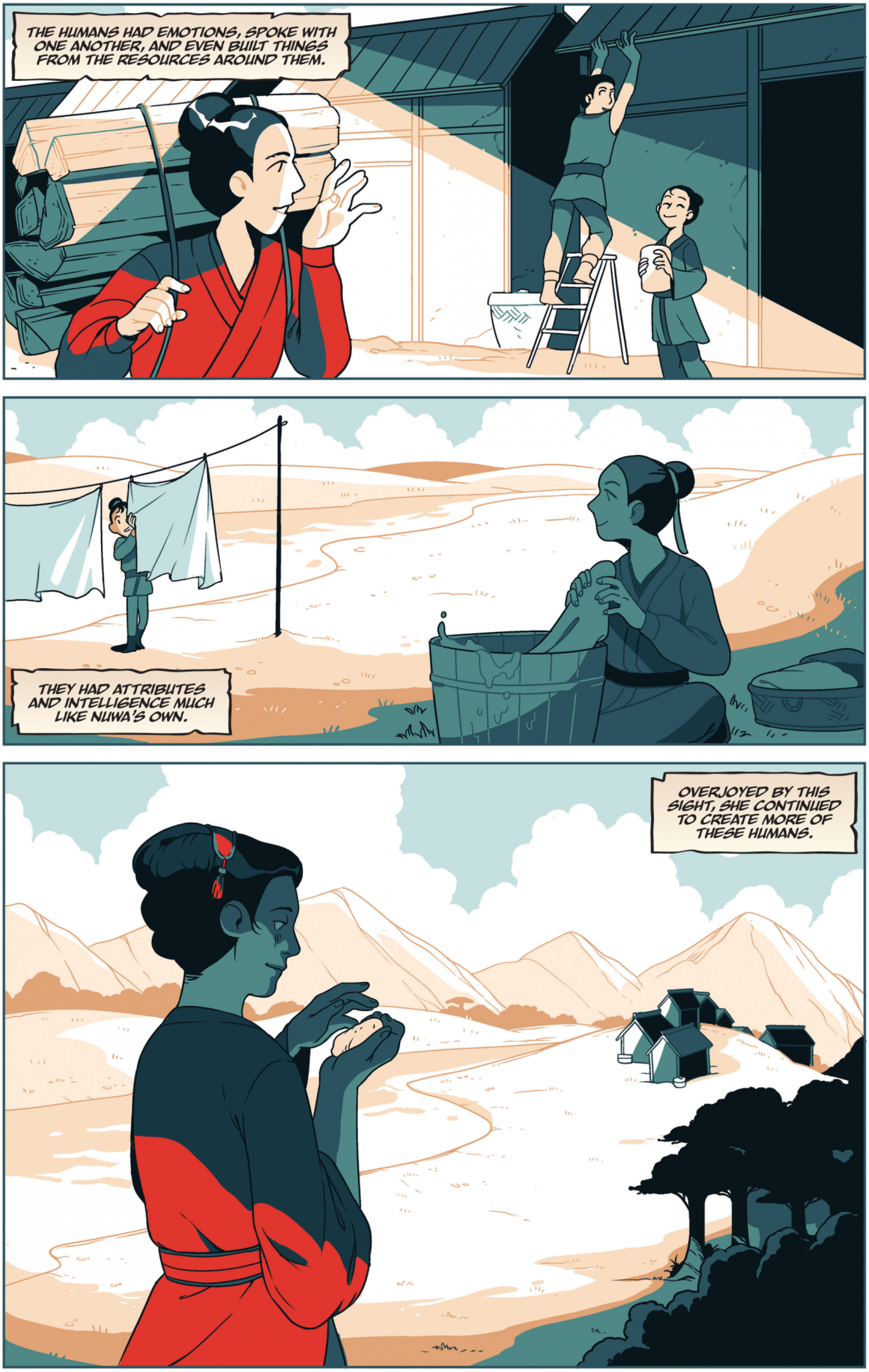

...THE FIRST HUMAN.

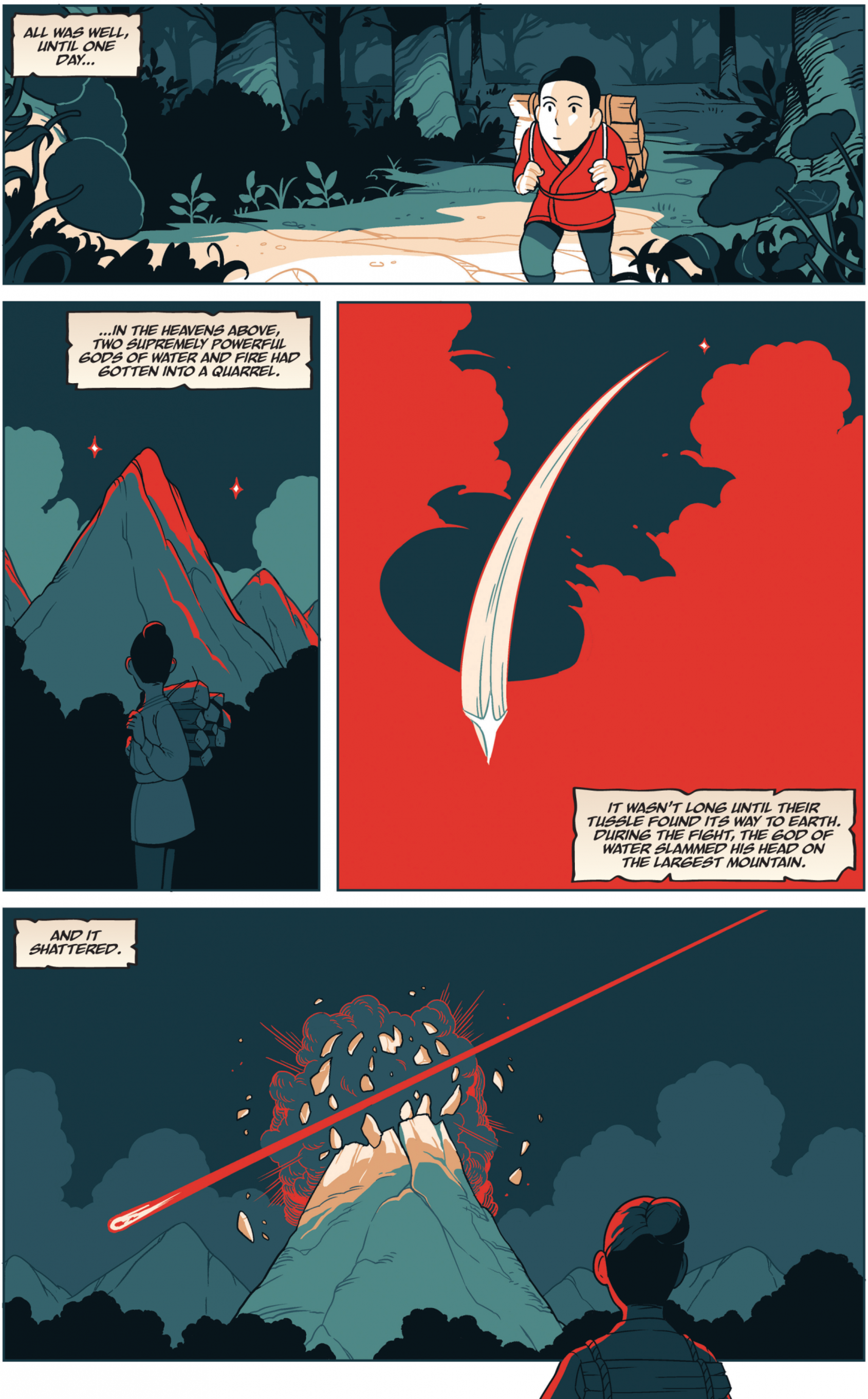

DELIGHTED, NUWA OBSERVED AS THE HUMAN TOOK THEIR FIRST STEPS ON SOLID GROUND.
THERE WAS SO MUCH MORE TO THESE CREATURES, SHE KNEW IT.
HOWEVER, THERE WAS AN ISSUE...

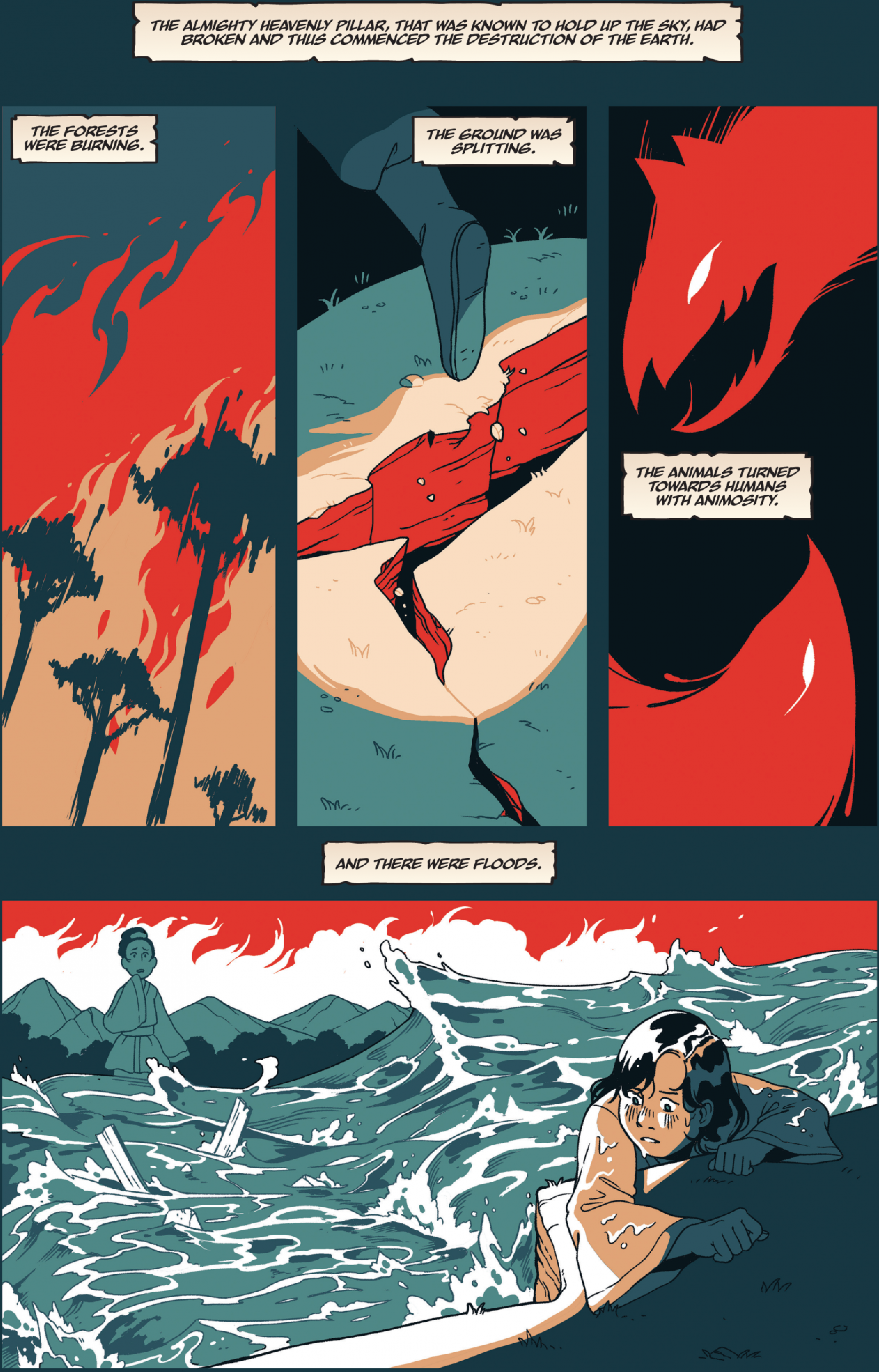

THE HUMAN WAS NOT STRONG ENOUGH, AND COULD NOT MAINTAIN ITS SHAPE.
NUWA WAS SURPRISED, BUT NOT PERTURBED. INTRIGUED MORE THAN ANYTHING.
SHE LEARNED THAT HUMANS NEEDED A SUITABLE VESSEL TO AID IN THEIR RATHER LARGE AMBITIONS.
A VESSEL WITH LOTS OF STRENGTH AND STRUCTURE.

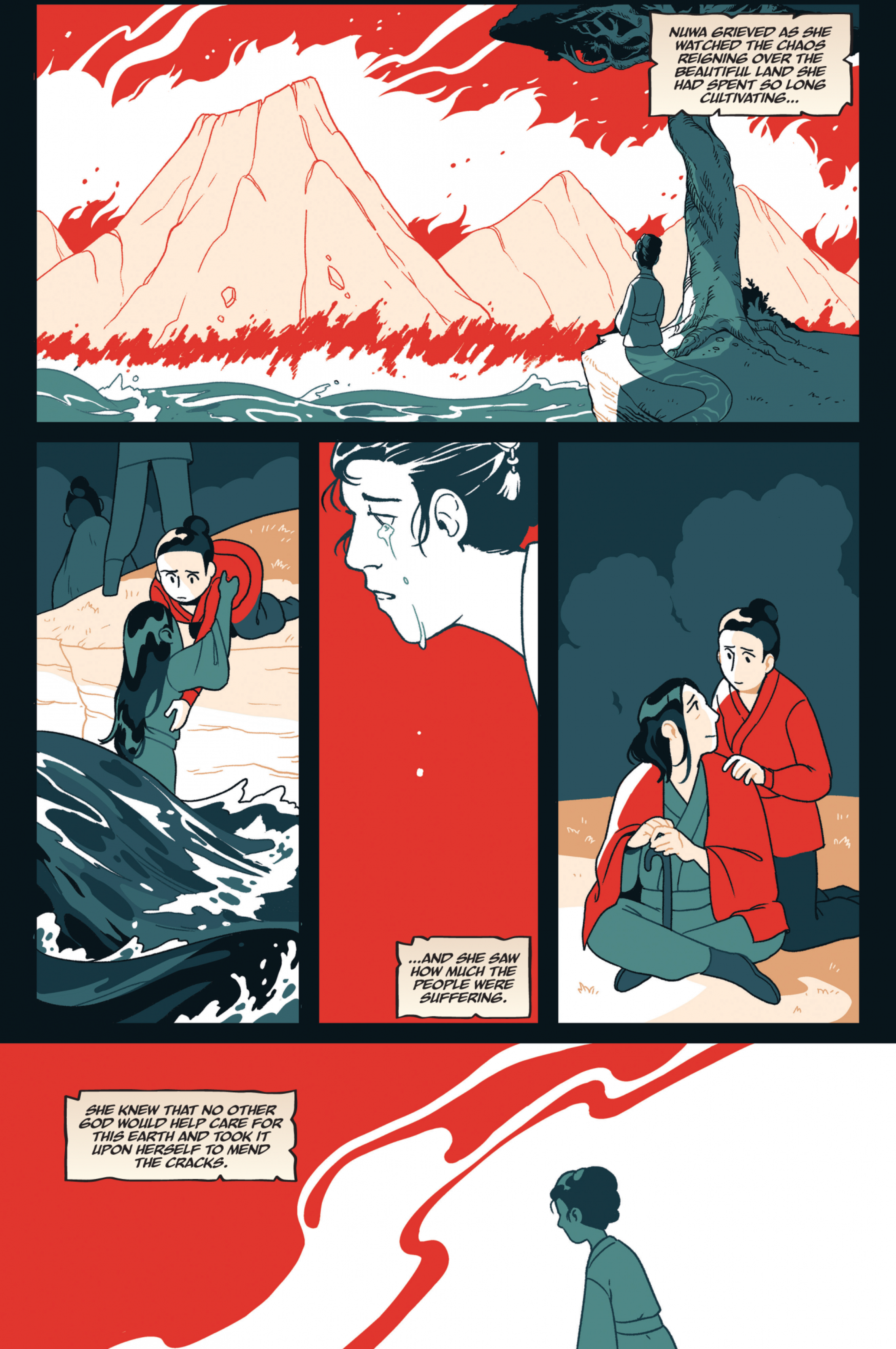

ON HER SECOND ATTEMPT, SHE CREATED THE PERFECT HUMANS, ONES MADE WITH A DIVINE ROPE THAT WILL HELP KEEP THEIR BODIES ERECT.

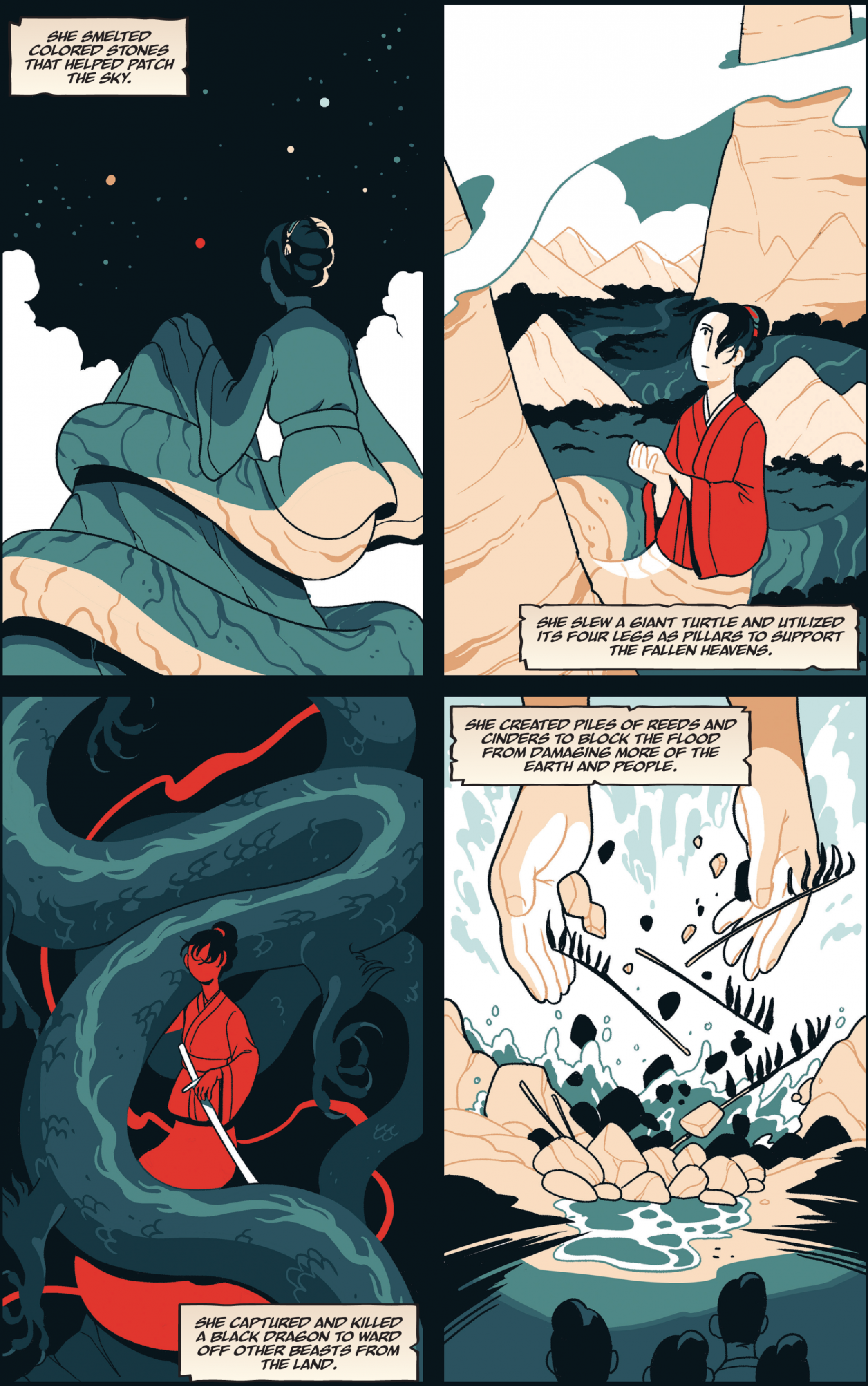

AS SHE SET THEM DOWN, THEY BEGAN TO DANCE AND RUN AROUND, REJOICING AT THEIR NEWFOUND LIFE.
THIS WAS EVERYTHING NUWA COULD EVER WANT.

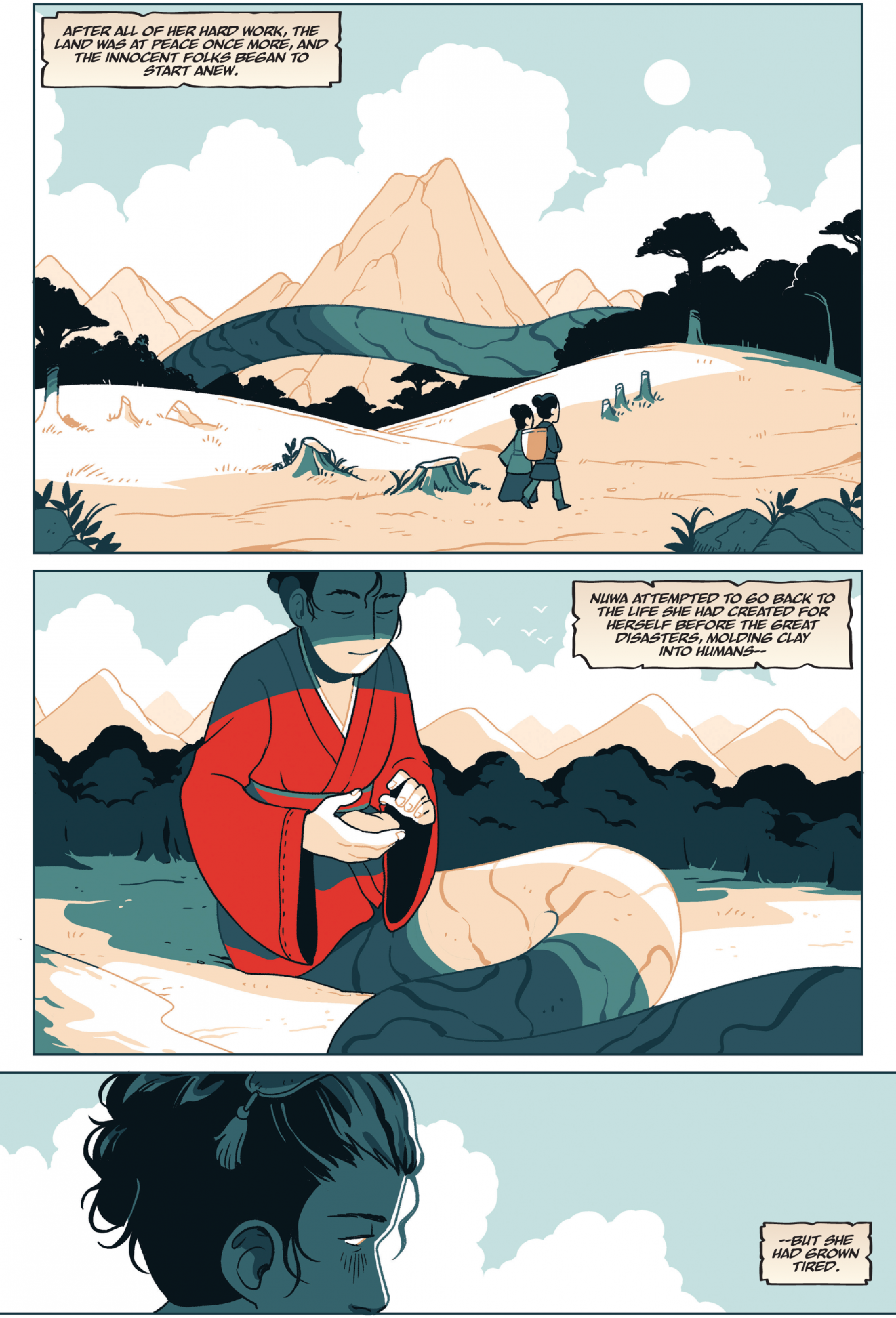

THE HUMANS HAD EMOTIONS, SPOKE WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND EVEN BUILT THINGS FROM THE RESOURCES AROUND THEM.
THEY HAD ATTRIBUTES AND INTELLIGENCE MUCH LIKE NUWA'S OWN.
OVERJOYED BY THIS SIGHT, SHE CONTINUED TO CREATE MORE OF THESE HUMANS.

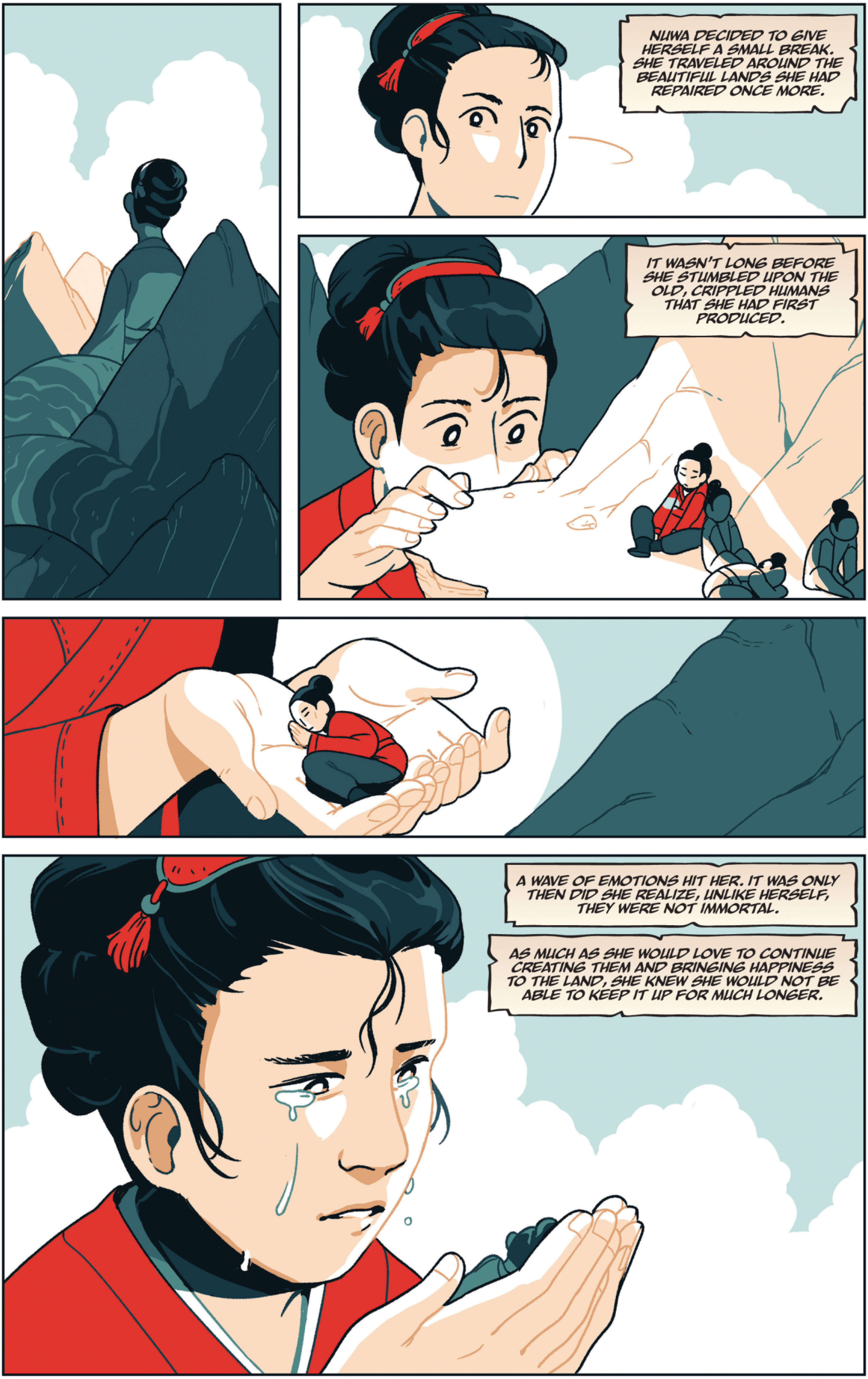

ALL WAS WELL, UNTIL ONE DAY...
...IN THE HEAVENS ABOVE, TWO SUPREMELY POWERFUL GODS OF WATER AND FIRE HAD GOTTEN INTO A QUARREL.
IT WASN'T LONG UNTIL THEIR TUSSLE FOUND ITS WAY TO EARTH. DURING THE FIGHT, THE GOD OF WATER SLAMMED HIS HEAD ON THE LARGEST MOUNTAIN.
AND IT SHATTERED.

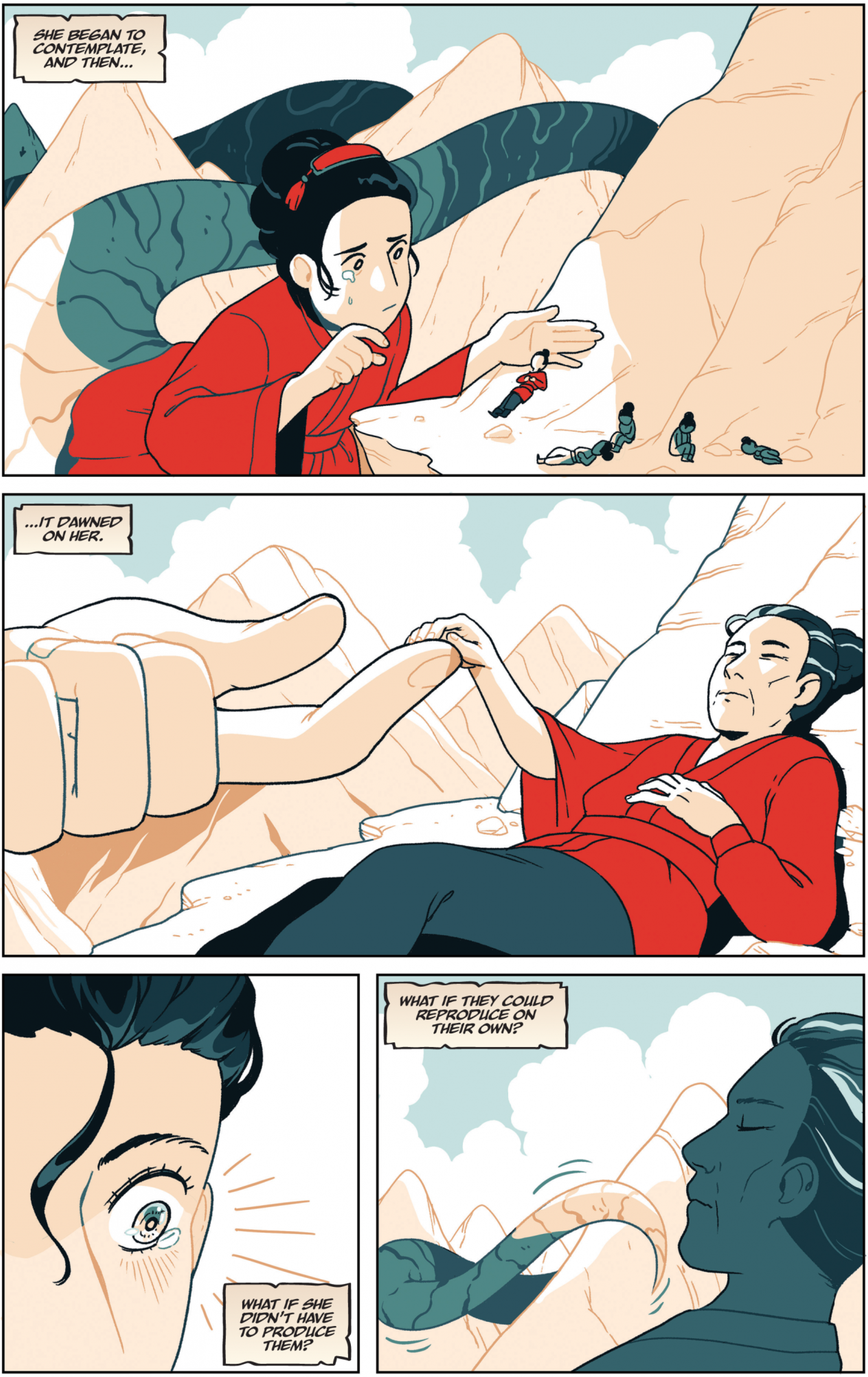

THE ALMIGHTY HEAVENLY PILLAR, THAT WAS KNOWN TO HOLD UP THE SKY, HAD BROKEN AND THUS COMMENCED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EARTH.
THE FORESTS WERE BURNING.
THE GROUND WAS SPLITTING.
THE ANIMALS TURNED TOWARDS HUMANS WITH ANIMOSITY.
AND THERE WERE FLOODS.

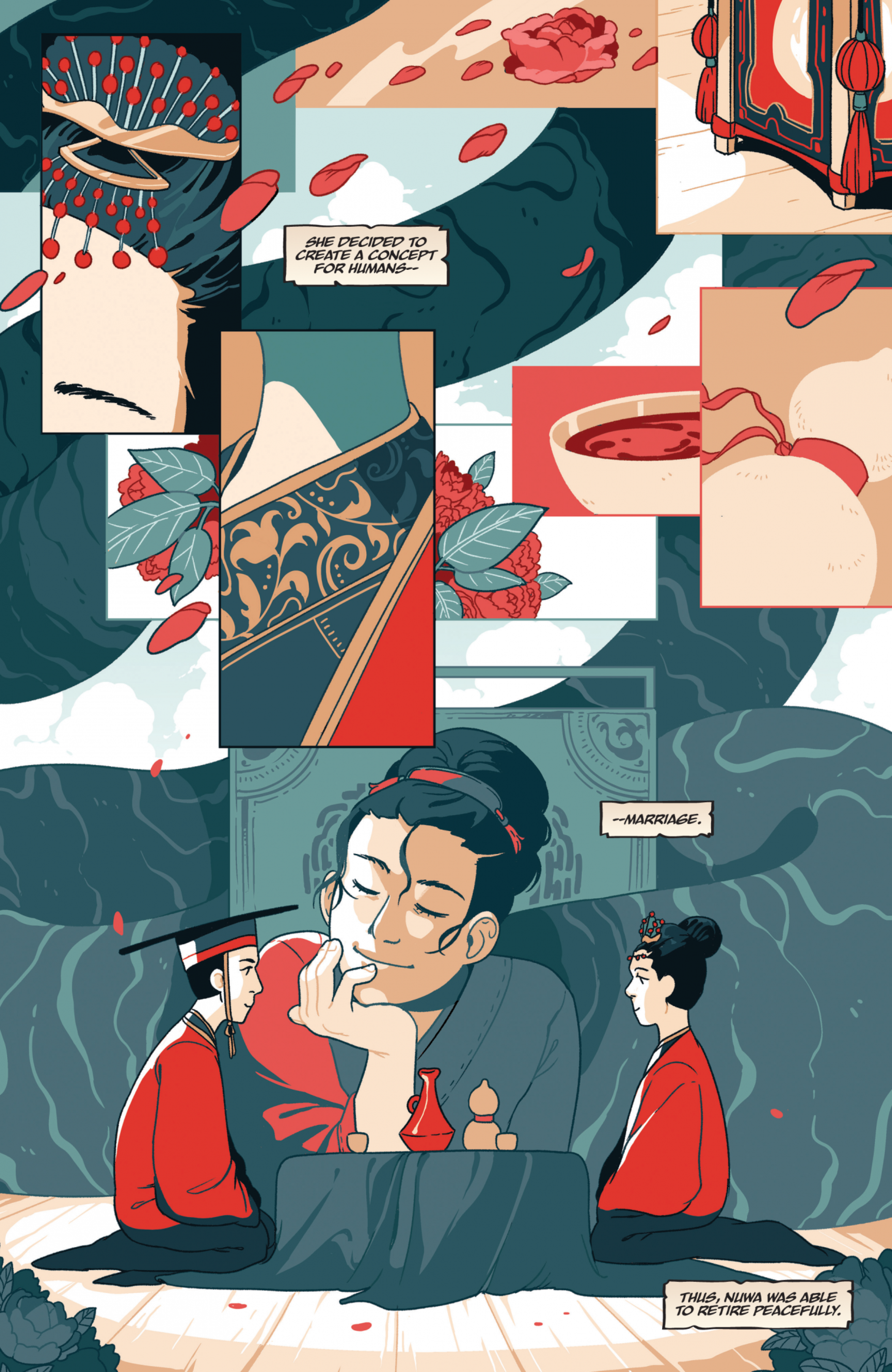

NUWA GRIEVED AS SHE WATCHED THE CHAOS REIGNING OVER THE BEAUTIFUL LAND SHE HAD SPENT SO LONG CULTIVATING...
...AND SHE SAW HOW MUCH THE PEOPLE WERE SUFFERING.
SHE KNEW THAT NO OTHER GOD WOULD HELP CARE FOR THIS EARTH AND TOOK IT UPON HERSELF TO MEND THE CRACKS.

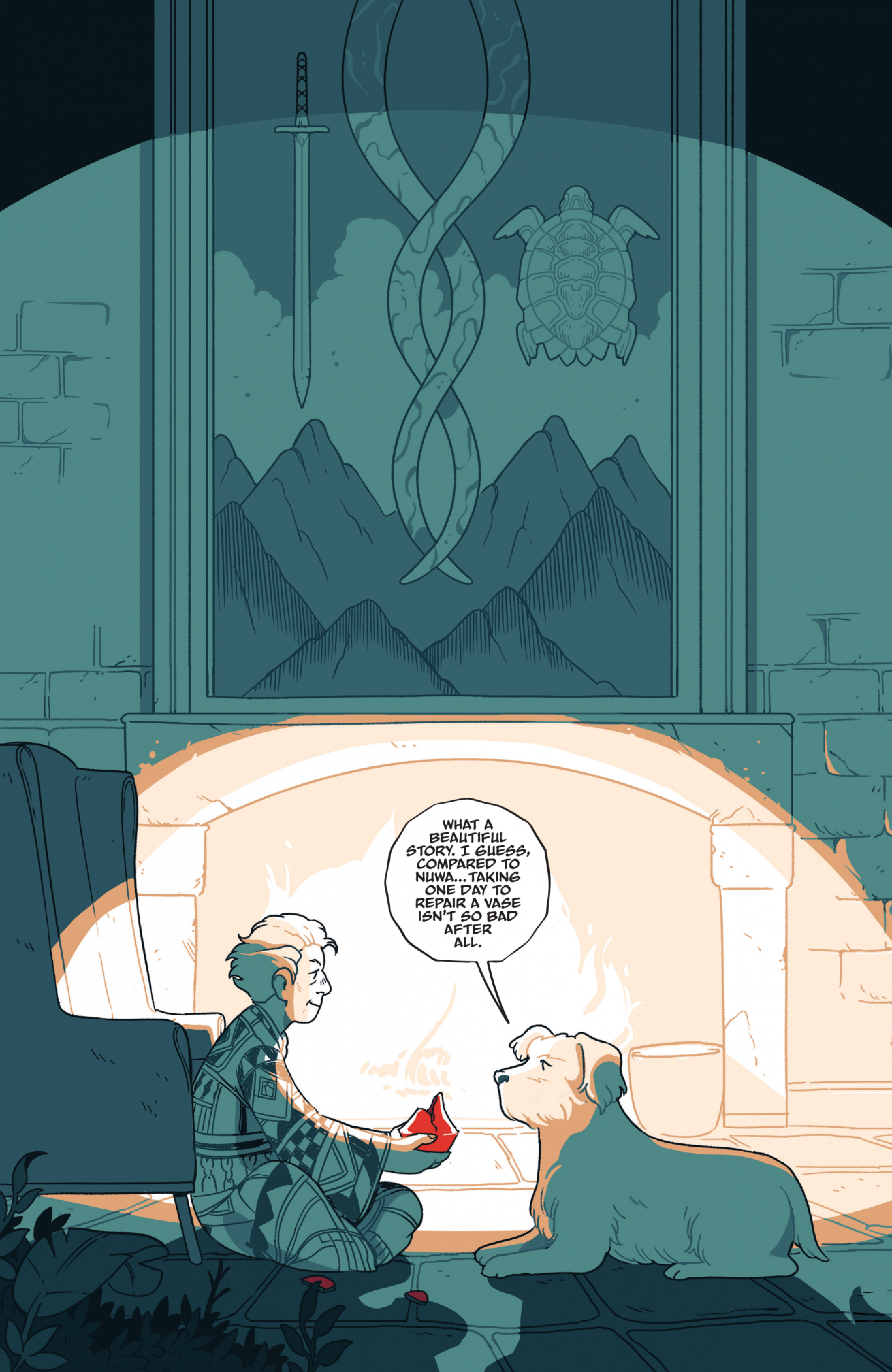

SHE SMELTED COLORED STONES THAT HELPED PATCH THE SKY.
SHE SLEW A GIANT TURTLE AND UTILIZED ITS FOUR LEGS AS PILLARS TO SUPPORT THE FALLEN HEAVENS.
SHE CAPTURED AND KILLED A BLACK DRAGON TO WARD OFF OTHER BEASTS FROM THE LAND.
SHE CREATED PILES OF REEDS AND CINDERS TO BLOCK THE FLOOD FROM DAMAGING MORE OF THE EARTH AND PEOPLE.


AFTER ALL OF HER HARD WORK, THE LAND WAS AT PEACE ONCE MORE, AND THE INNOCENT FOLKS BEGAN TO START ANEW.
NUWA ATTEMPTED TO GO BACK TO THE LIFE SHE HAD CREATED FOR HERSELF BEFORE THE GREAT DISASTERS, MOLDING CLAY INTO HUMANS--
--BUT SHE HAD GROWN TIRED.


NUWA DECIDED TO GIVE HERSELF A SMALL BREAK. SHE TRAVELED AROUND THE BEAUTIFUL LANDS SHE HAD REPAIRED ONCE MORE.
IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE SHE STUMBLED UPON THE OLD, CRIPPLED HUMANS THAT SHE HAD FIRST PRODUCED.
A WAVE OF EMOTIONS HIT HER. IT WAS ONLY THEN DID SHE REALIZE, UNLIKE HERSELF, THEY WERE NOT IMMORTAL.
AS MUCH AS SHE WOULD LOVE TO CONTINUE CREATING THEM AND BRINGING HAPPINESS TO THE LAND, SHE KNEW SHE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO KEEP IT UP FOR MUCH LONGER.


SHE BEGAN TO CONTEMPLATE, AND THEN...
...IT DAWNED ON HER.
WHAT IF SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO PRODUCE THEM?
WHAT IF THEY COULD REPRODUCE ON THEIR OWN?


SHE DECIDED TO CREATE A CONCEPT FOR HUMANS--
--MARRIAGE.
THUS, NUWA WAS ABLE TO RETIRE PEACEFULLY.


WHAT A BEAUTIFUL STORY. I GUESS, COMPARED TO NUWA...TAKING ONE DAY TO REPAIR A VASE ISN'T SO BAD AFTER ALL.

TALE THREE COVER
SARAH WEBB

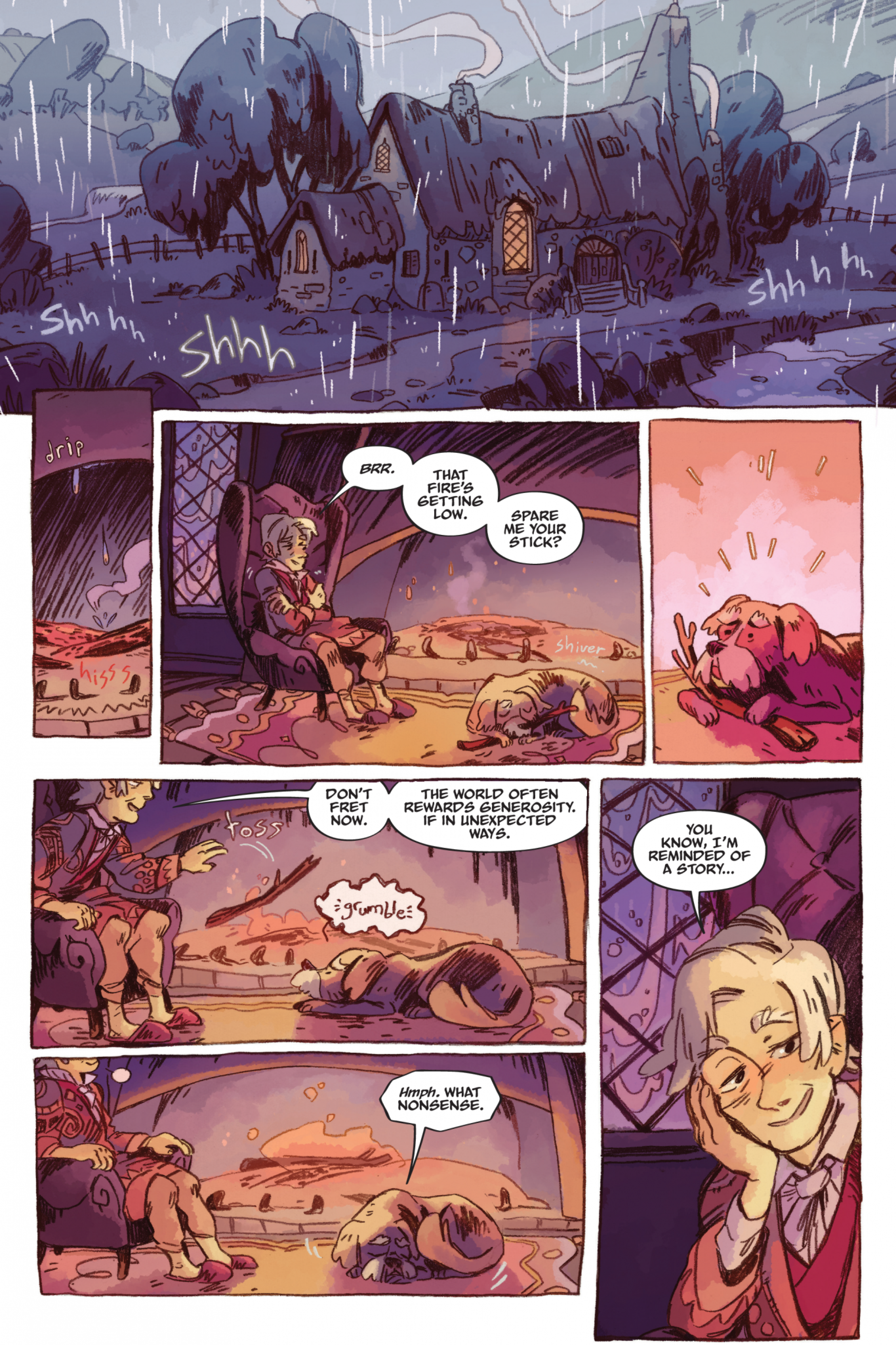
One Spared to the Sea

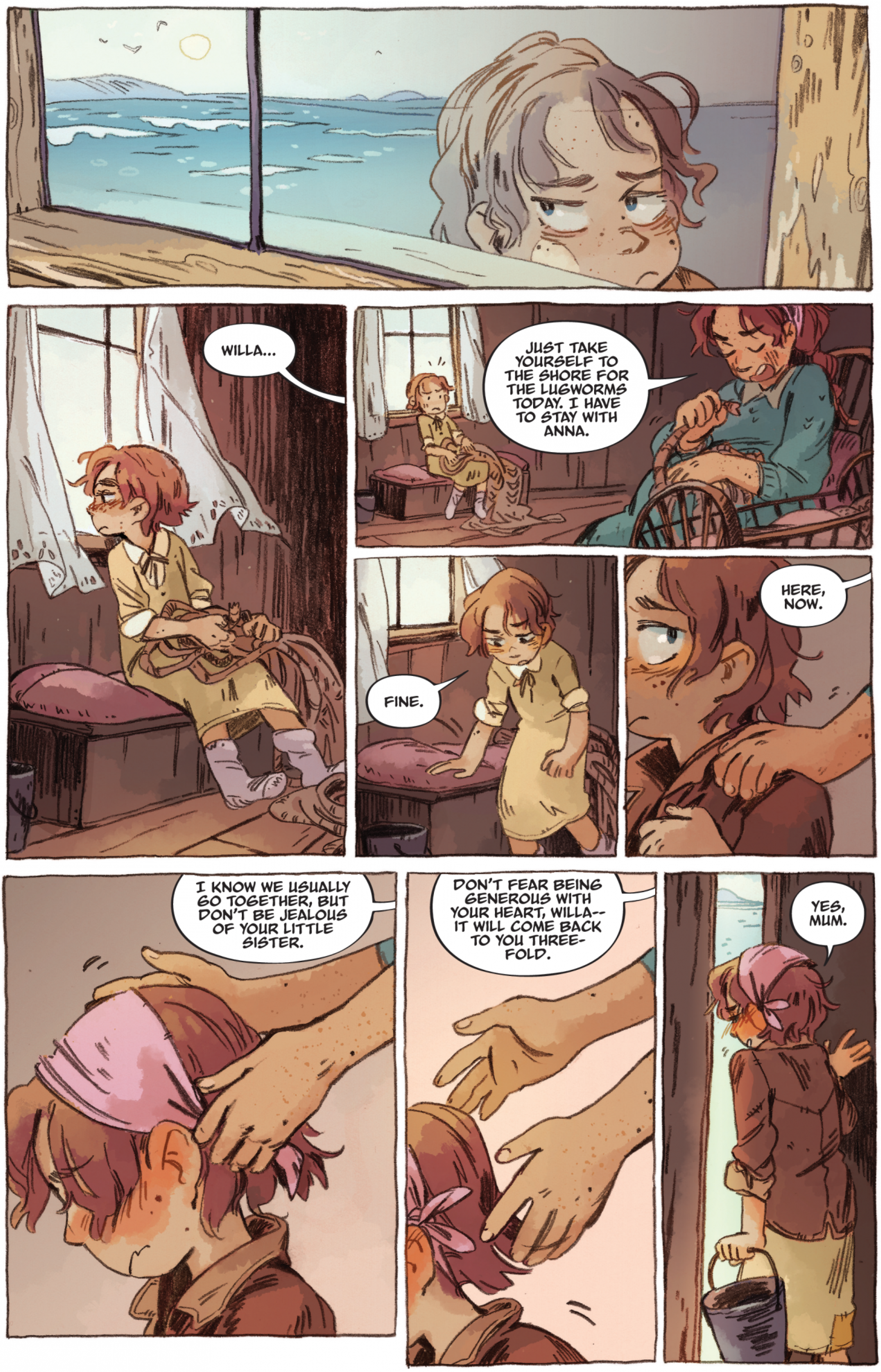
While researching Northern European siren tales, I was drawn to the popular themes of rewarding generosity and kindness, and respecting nature's capricious potential for either good or ill. The original version of this particular tale comes from Orkney, in the Northern Isles of Scotland, where selkies often made appearances.

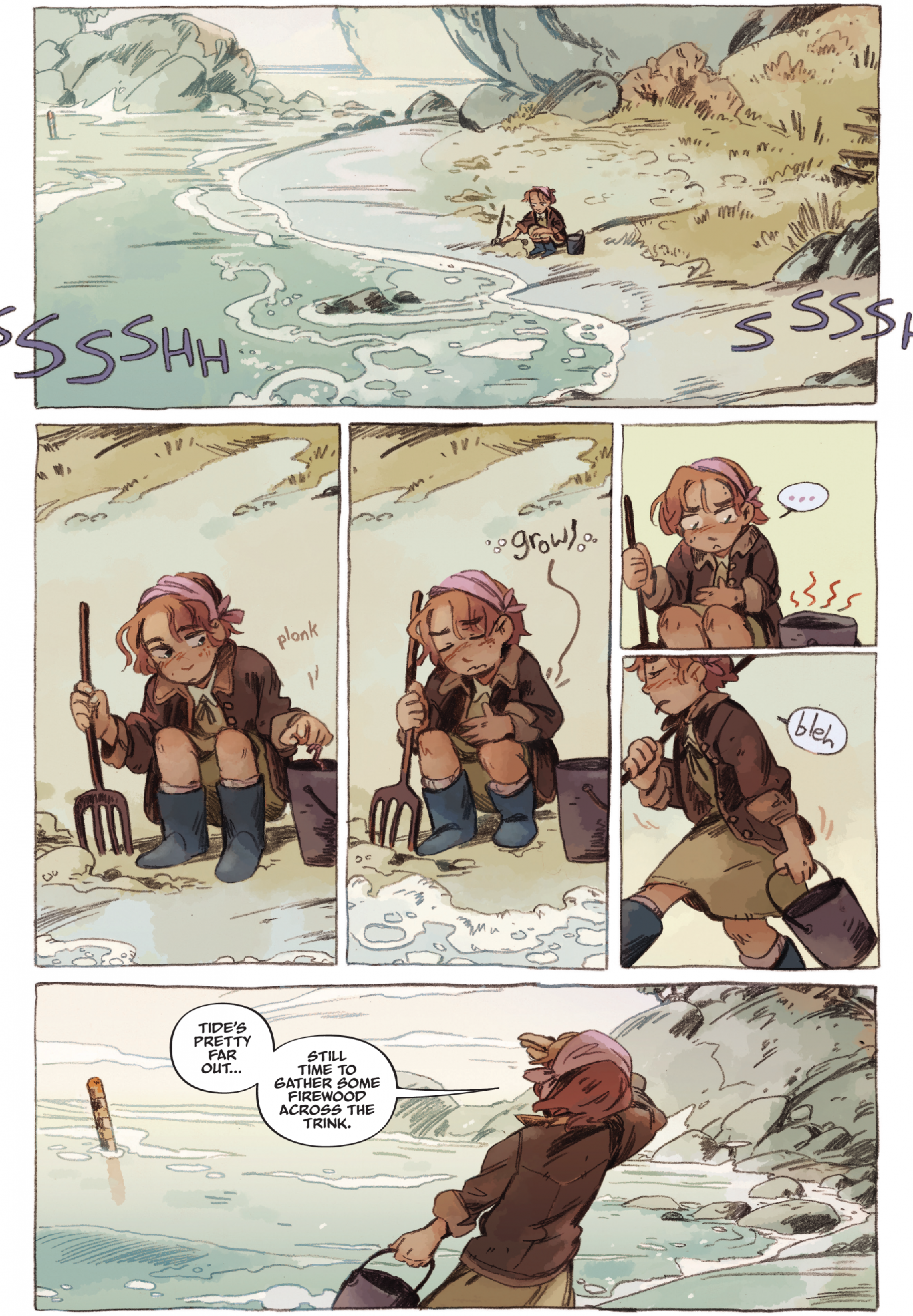
Our main character was originally Willie Westness of O'er the Watter before we switched the point of view to his children, seven years later. I wanted to bring together both halves of this story a little differently and give the reader a stronger main character with an arc of their own to follow. In my retelling, our main character Willa Westness is introduced as a slightly selfish child and returns seven years later as the older sibling struggling to be less selfish.

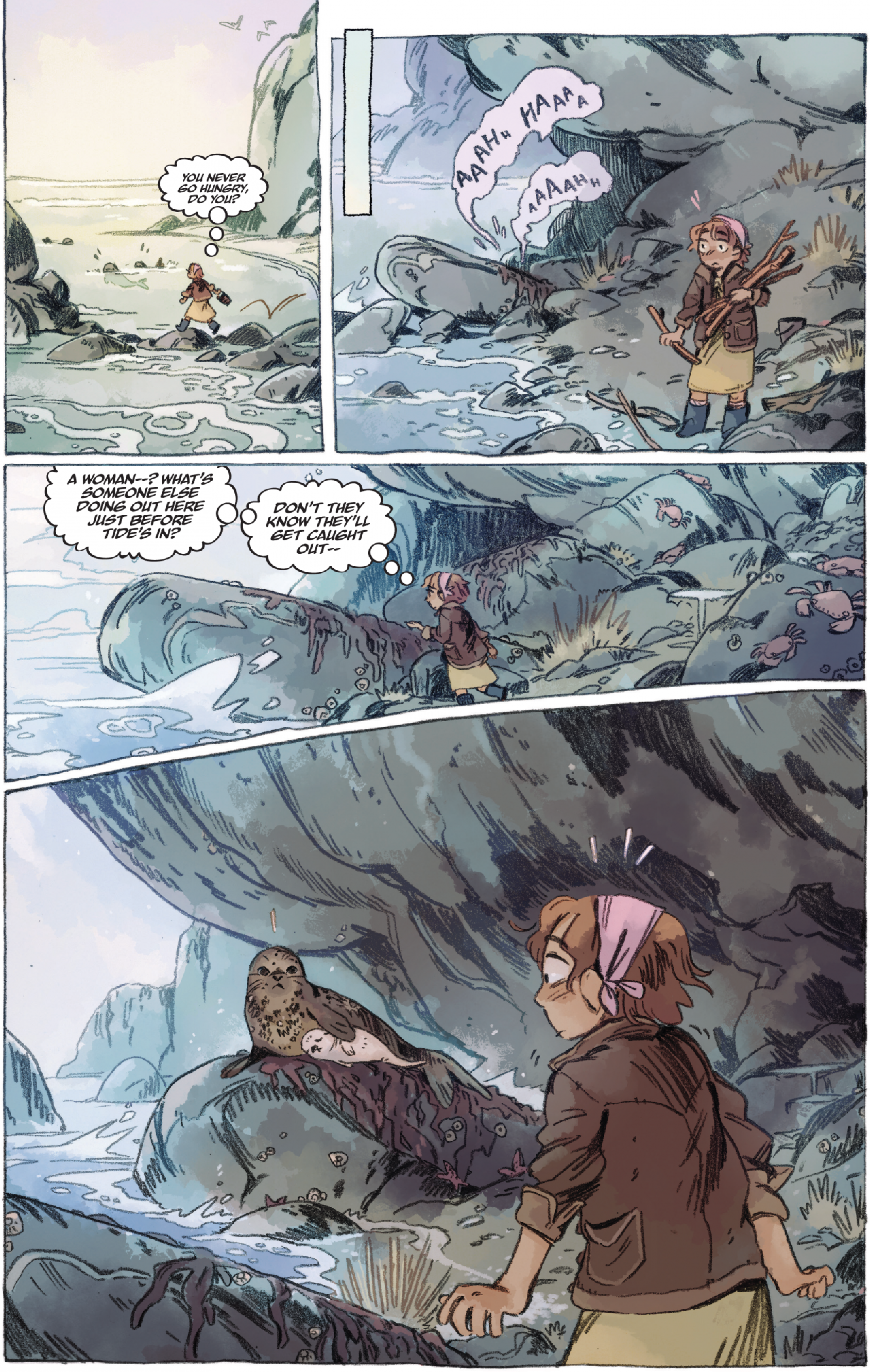
I also wanted to tell a selkie story that had a simpler, sweeter, and more equal-footed romance than most selkie tales. My favorite aspect of this tale was that our main character's kindness is eventually rewarded three-fold: Her siblings' lives and her own life are all spared, she is blessed with a fishing bounty, and she gains the love and care of her family as well as of the selkie girl.

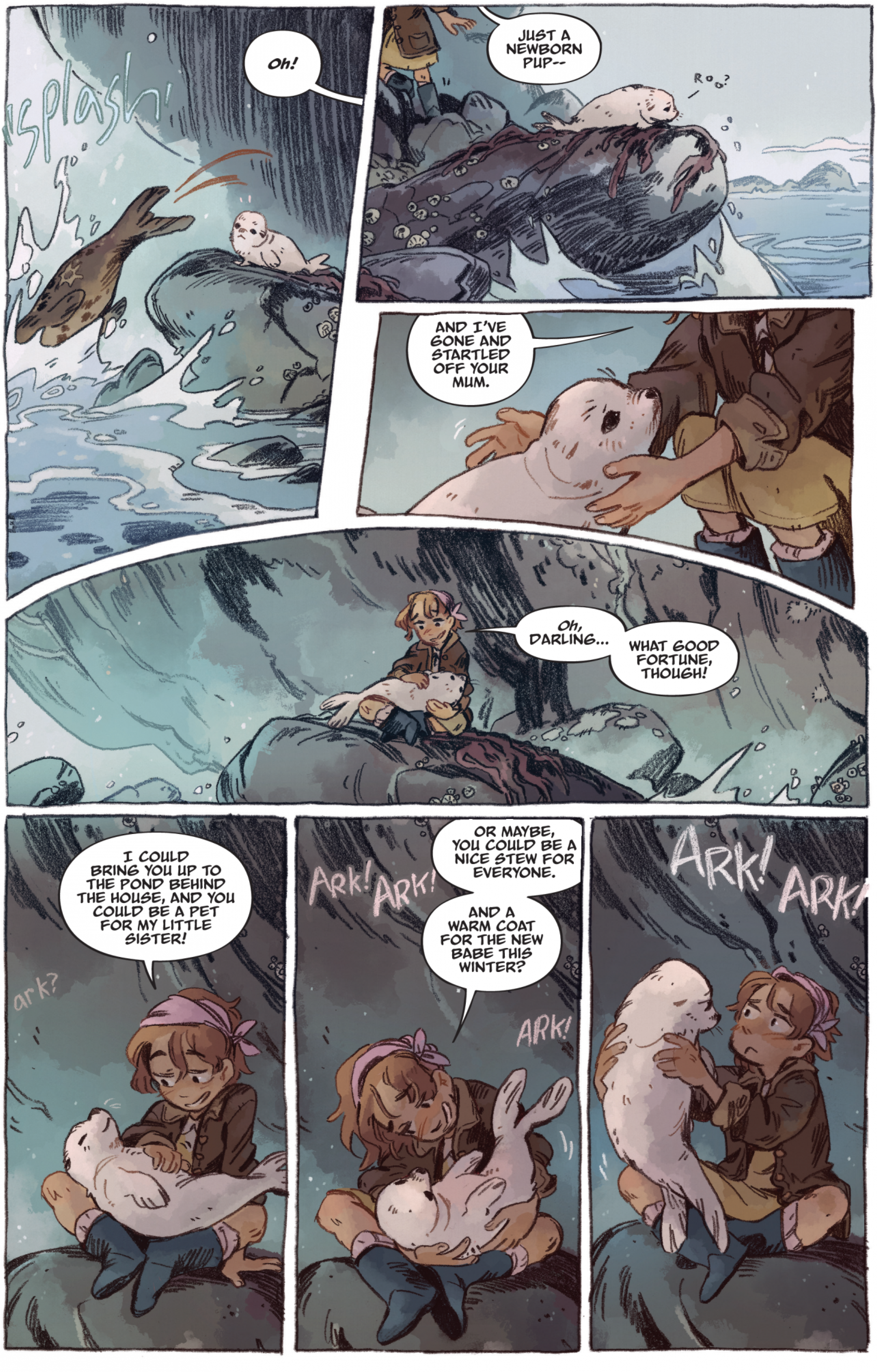
– Sarah Webb

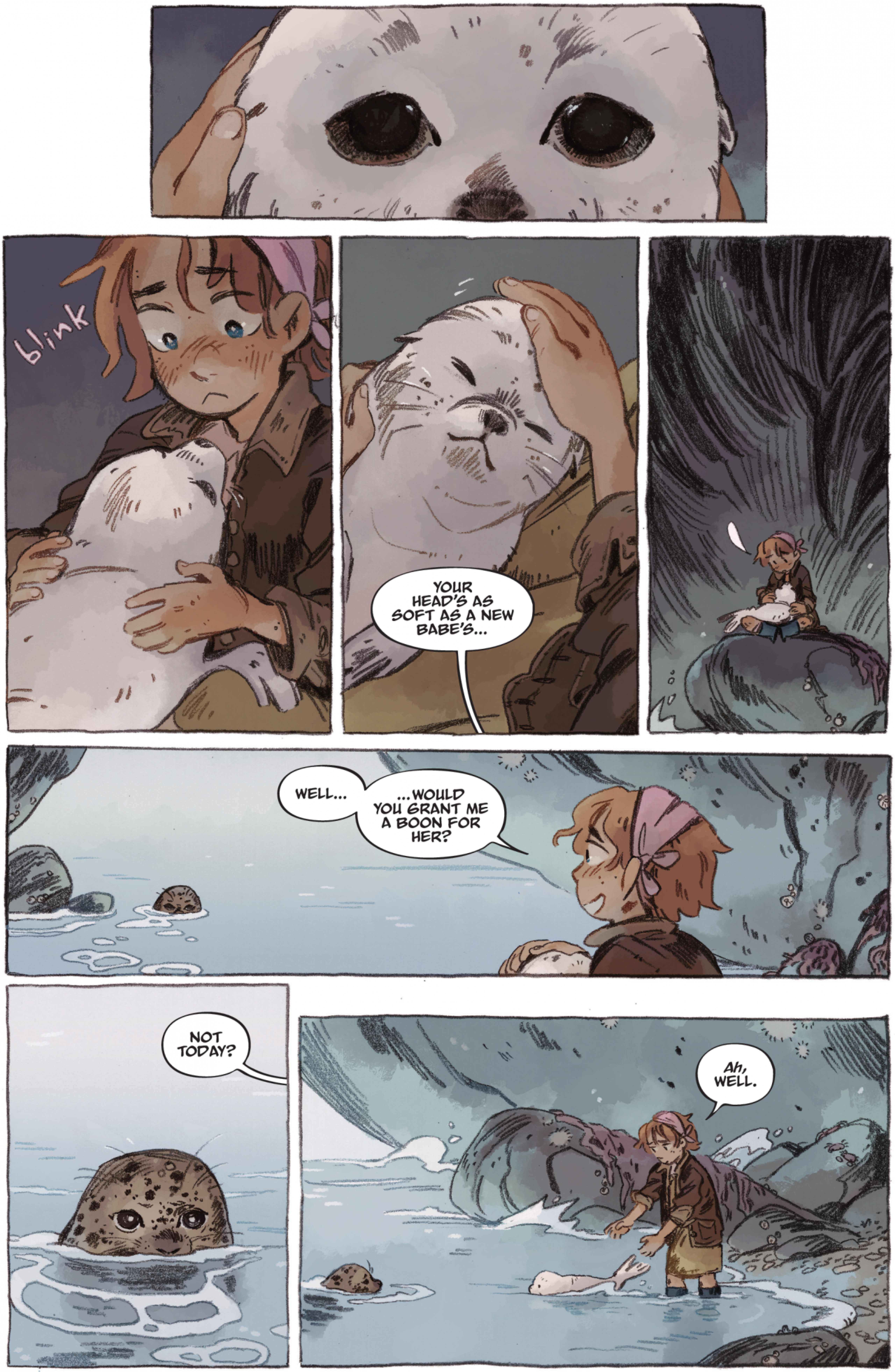

Shhhh
shhhh
shhhhh
drip
hisss
BRR.
THAT FIRE'S GETTING LOW.
SPARE ME YOUR STICK?
shiver
toss
DON'T FRET NOW.
THE WORLD OFTEN REWARDS GENEROSITY. IF IN UNEXPECTED WAYS.
grumble
Hmph. WHAT NONSENSE.
YOU KNOW, I'M REMINDED OF A STORY...

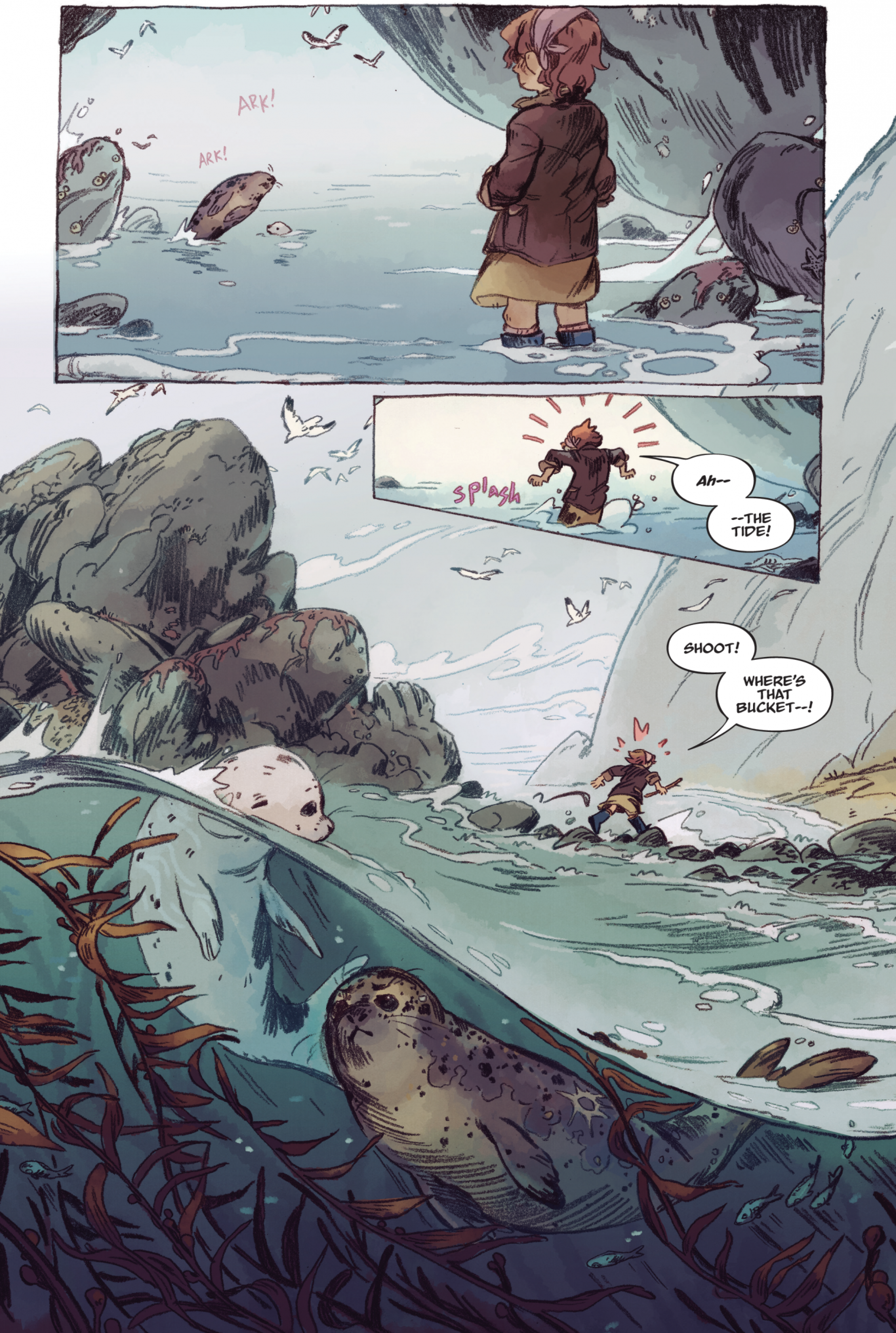

WILLA...
JUST TAKE YOURSELF TO THE SHORE FOR THE LUGWORMS TODAY. I HAVE TO STAY WITH ANNA.
FINE.
HERE, NOW.
I KNOW WE USUALLY GO TOGETHER, BUT DON'T BE JEALOUS OF YOUR LITTLE SISTER.
DON'T FEAR BEING GENEROUS WITH YOUR HEART, WILLA-- IT WILL COME BACK TO YOU THREE-FOLD.
YES, MUM.

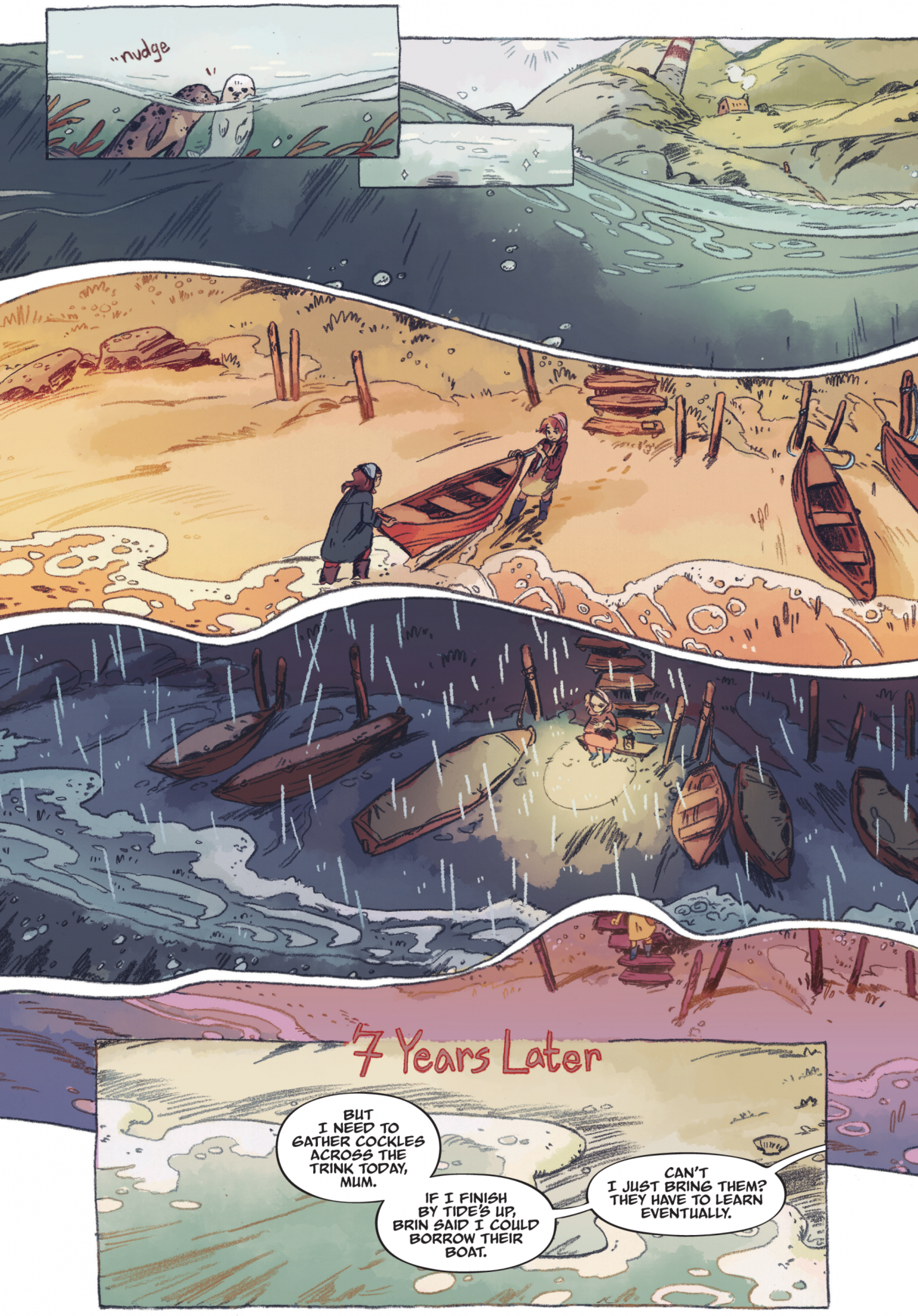

SSSSHH
SSSSH
plonk
growl
...
bleh
TIDE'S PRETTY FAR OUT...
STILL TIME TO GATHER SOME FIREWOOD ACROSS THE TRINK.

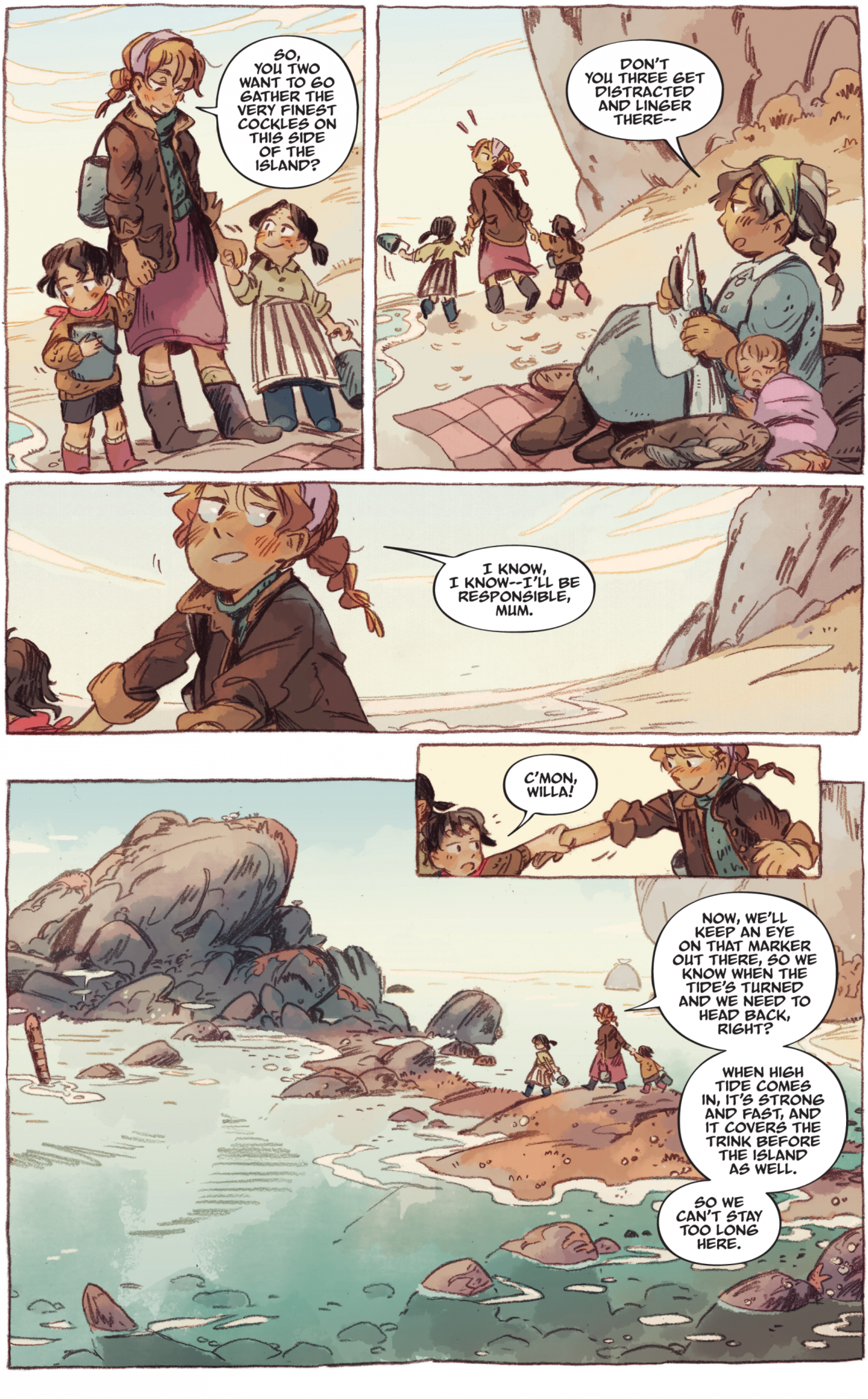

YOU NEVER GO HUNGRY, DO YOU?
AAAHH HAAAAA
AAAAHH
A WOMAN--? WHAT'S SOMEONE ELSE DOING OUT HERE JUST BEFORE TIDE'S IN?
DON'T THEY KNOW THEY'LL GET CAUGHT OUT--

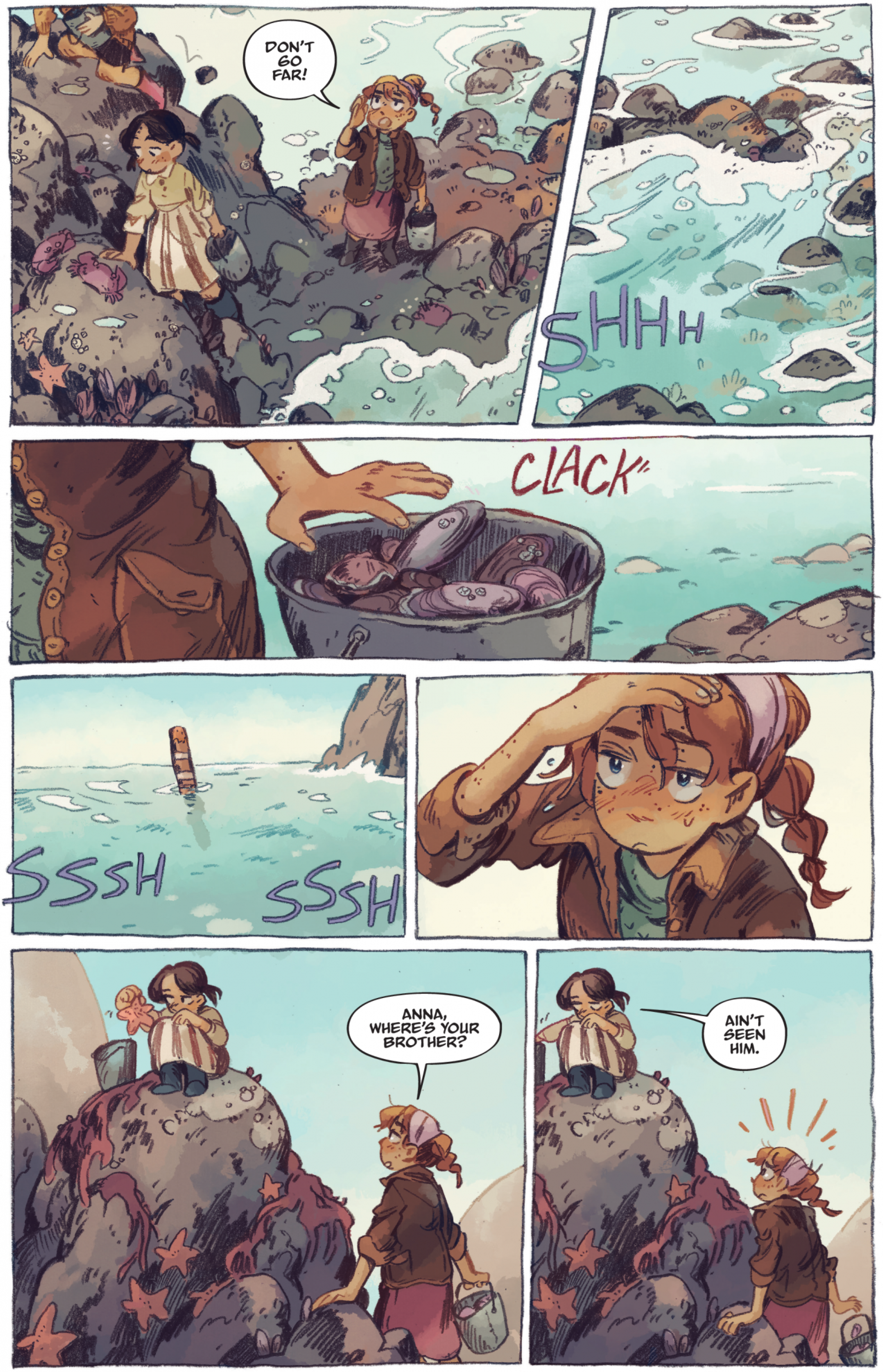

splash!
Oh!
JUST A NEWBORN PUP--
Roo?
AND I'VE GONE AND STARTLED OFF YOUR MUM.
Oh, DARLING...
WHAT GOOD FORTUNE, THOUGH!
I COULD BRING YOU UP TO THE POND BEHIND THE HOUSE, AND YOU COULD BE A PET FOR MY LITTLE SISTER!
ark?
ARK! ARK!
OR MAYBE, YOU COULD BE A NICE STEW FOR EVERYONE.
AND A WARM COAT FOR THE NEW BABE THIS WINTER?
ARK!
ARK! ARK!

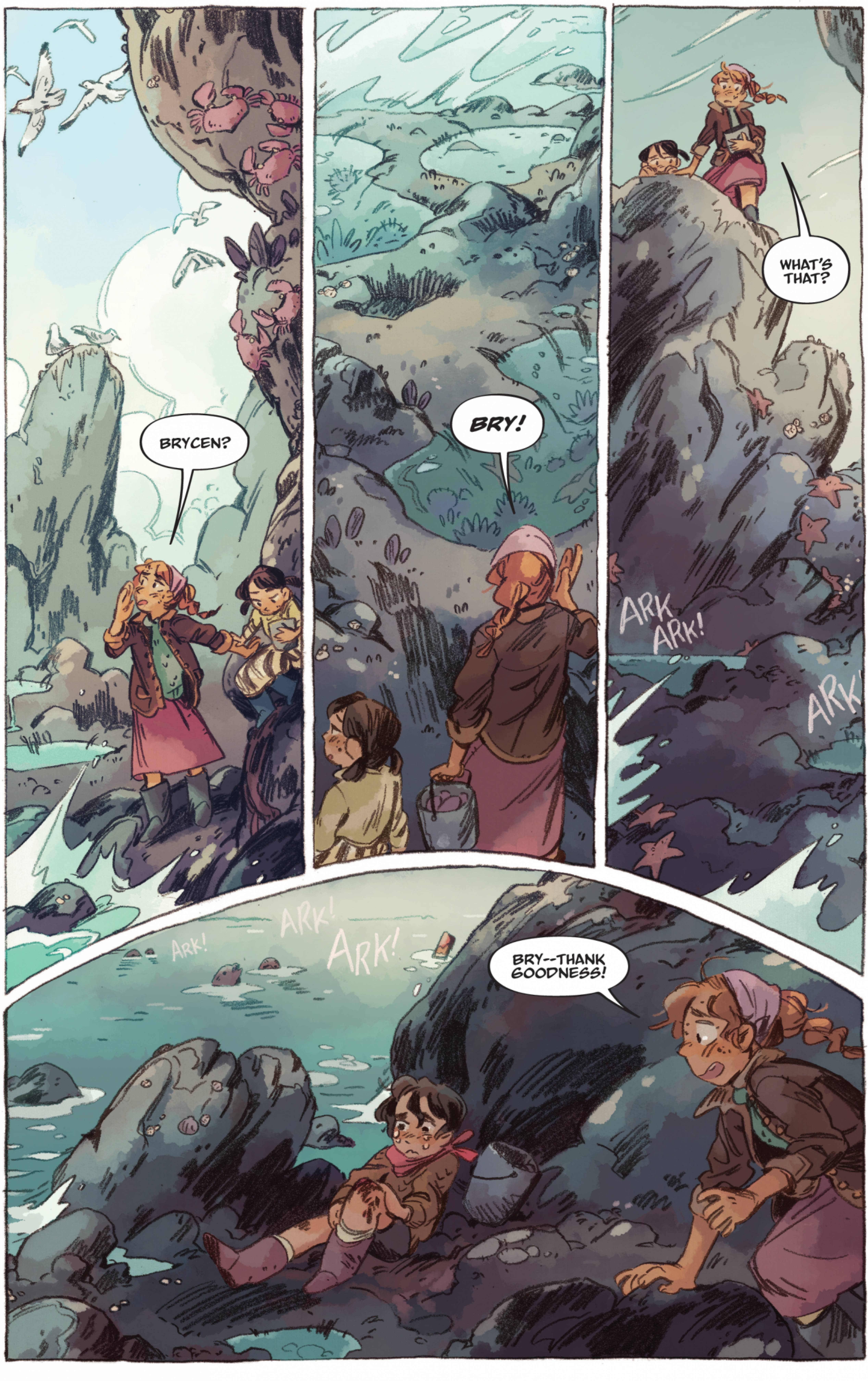

blink
YOUR HEAD'S AS SOFT AS A NEW BABE'S...
WELL...
...WOULD YOU GRANT ME A BOON FOR HER?
NOT TODAY?
Ah, WELL.

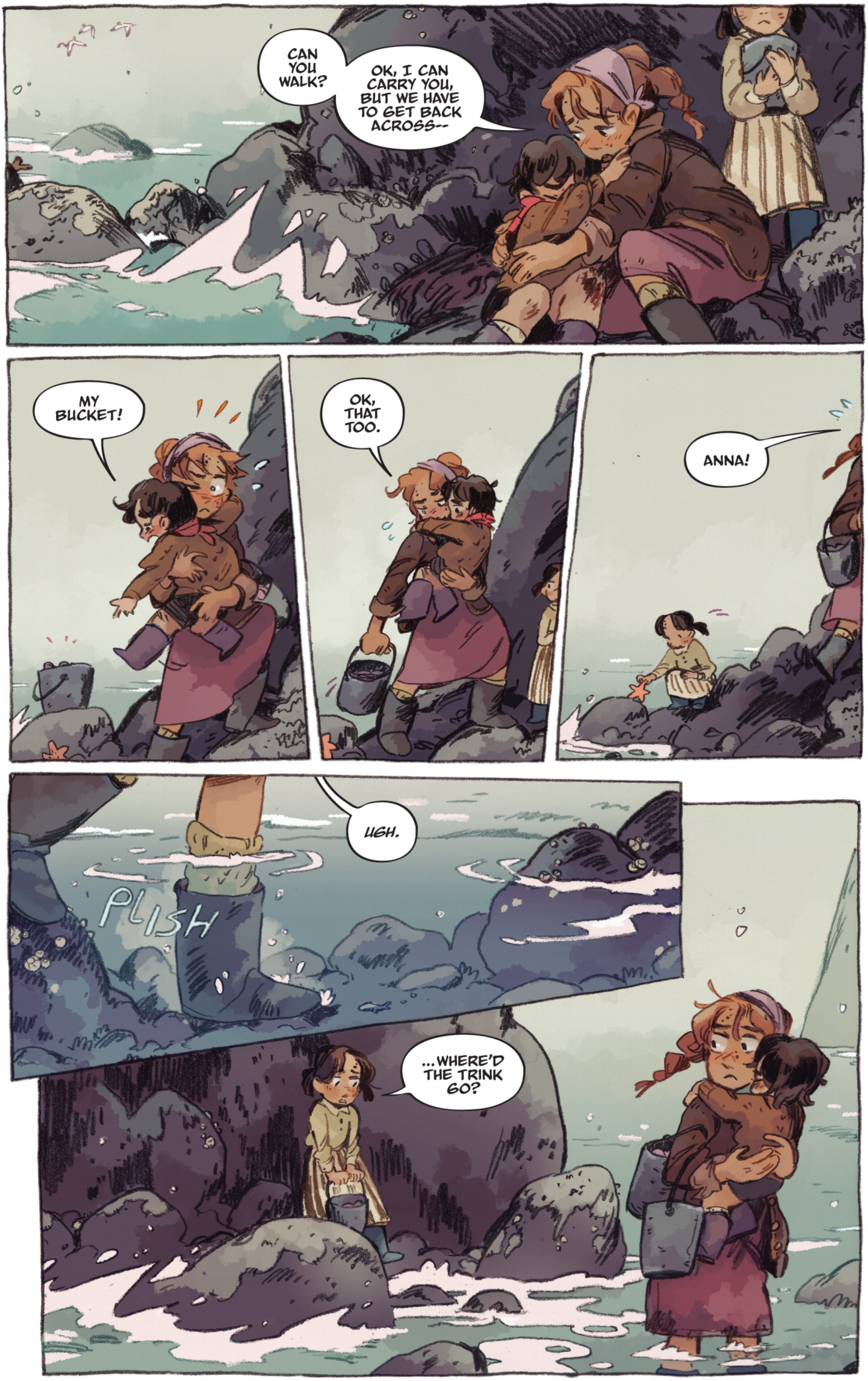

ARK!
ARK!
splash
Ah--
--THE TIDE!
SHOOT!
WHERE'S THAT BUCKET--!

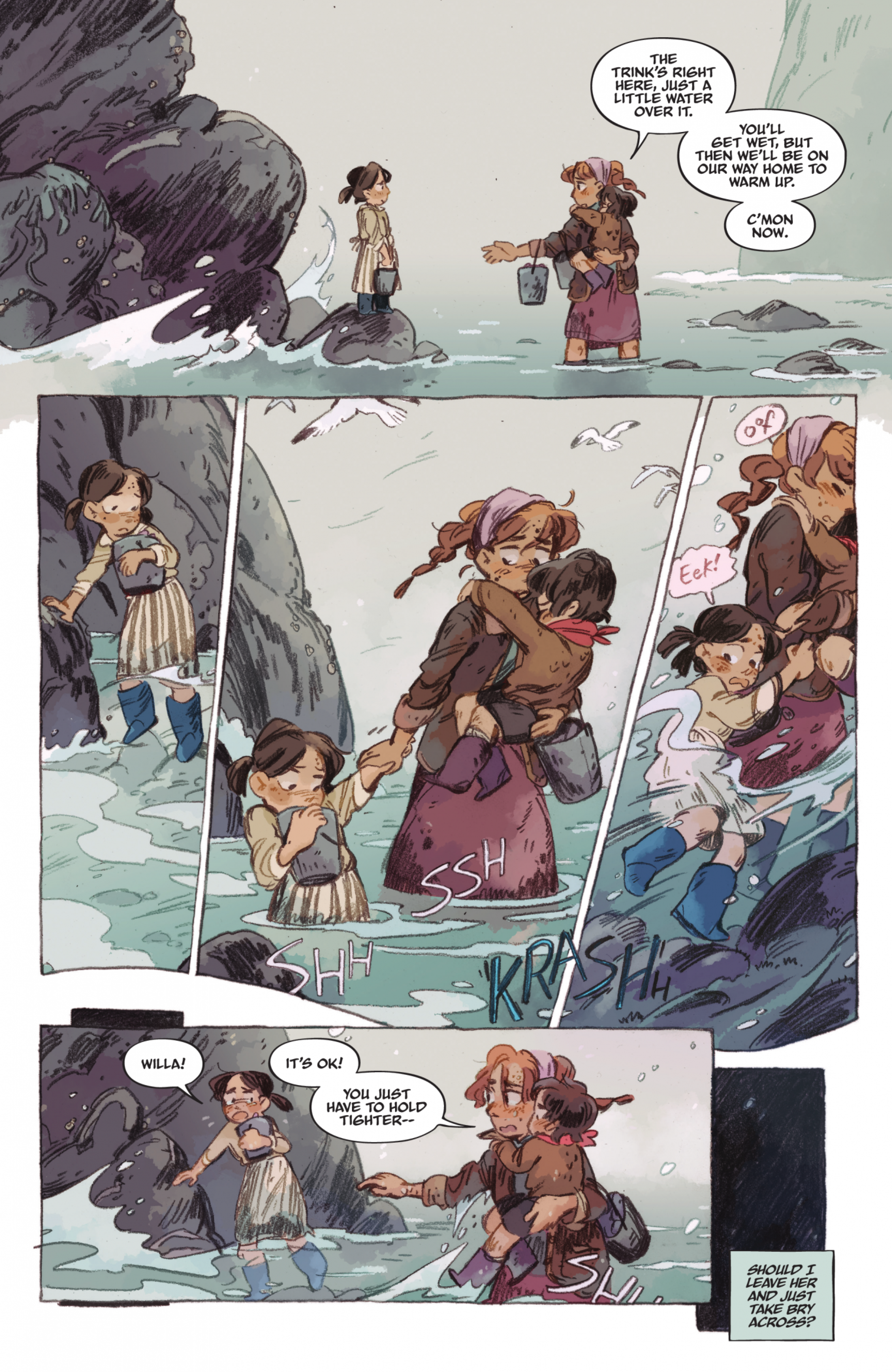

..nudge
7 Years Later
BUT I NEED TO GATHER COCKLES ACROSS THE TRINK TODAY, MUM.
IF I FINISH BY TIDE'S UP, BRIN SAID I COULD BORROW THEIR BOAT.
CAN'T I JUST BRING THEM? THEY HAVE TO LEARN EVENTUALLY.

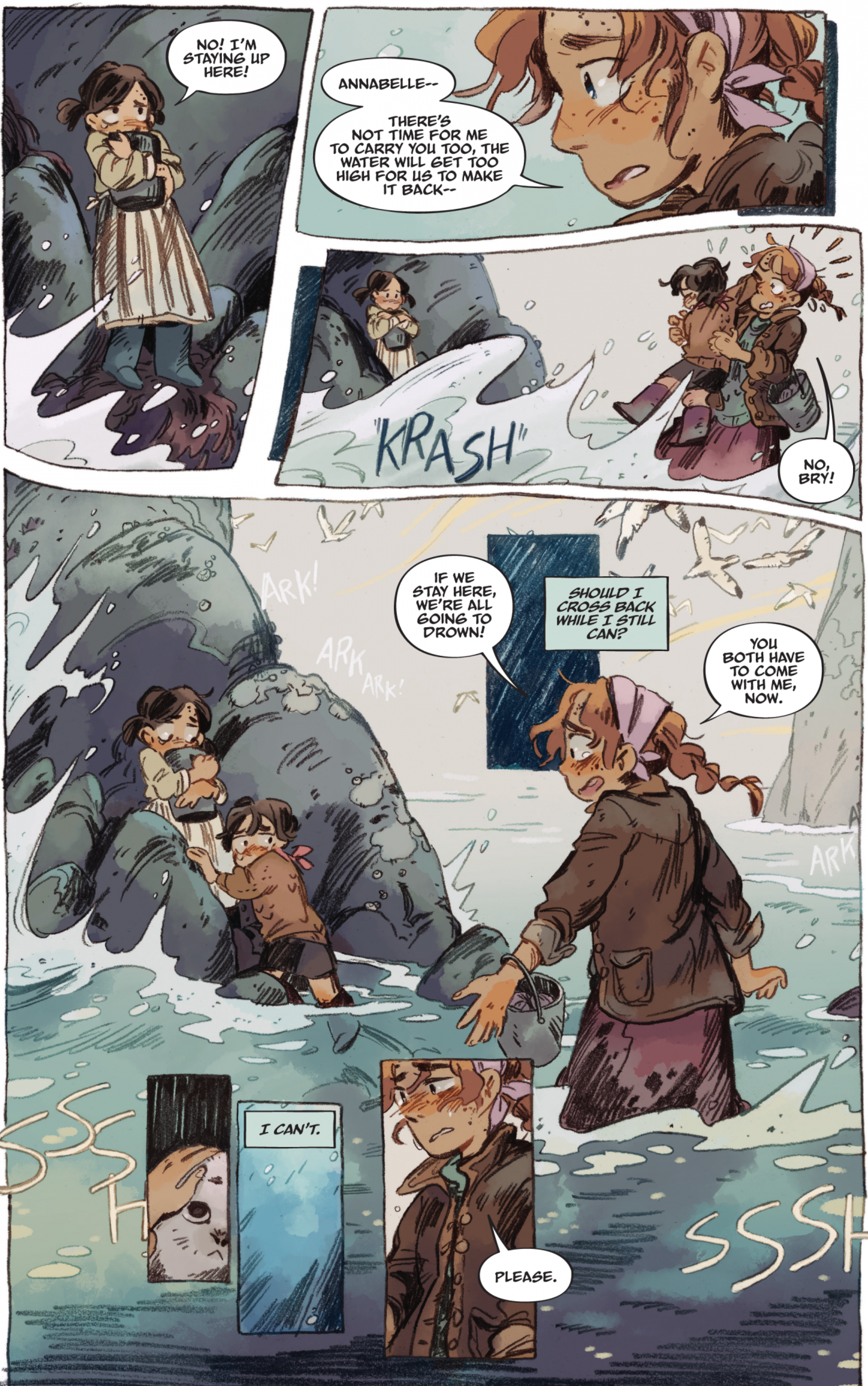

SO, YOU TWO WANT TO GO GATHER THE VERY FINEST COCKLES ON THIS SIDE OF THE ISLAND?
DON'T YOU THREE GET DISTRACTED AND LINGER THERE--
I KNOW, I KNOW--I'LL BE RESPONSIBLE, MUM.
C'MON, WILLA!
NOW, WE'LL KEEP AN EYE ON THAT MARKER OUT THERE, SO WE KNOW WHEN THE TIDE'S TURNED AND WE NEED TO HEAD BACK, RIGHT?
WHEN HIGH TIDE COMES IN, IT'S STRONG AND FAST, AND IT COVERS THE TRINK BEFORE THE ISLAND AS WELL.
SO WE CAN'T STAY TOO LONG HERE.

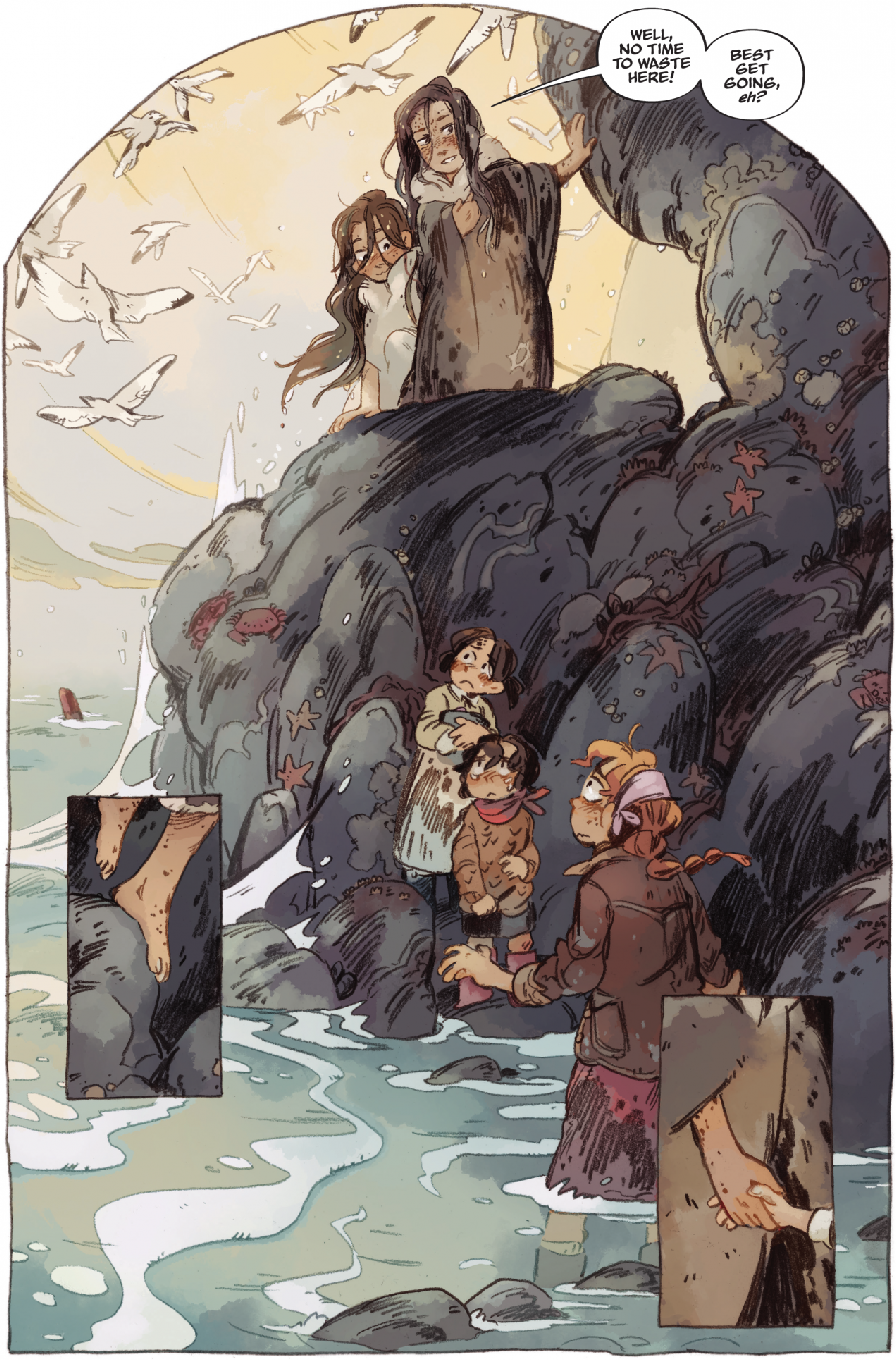

DON'T GO FAR!
SHHHH
CLACK
SSSH
SSSH
ANNA, WHERE'S YOUR BROTHER?
AIN'T SEEN HIM.

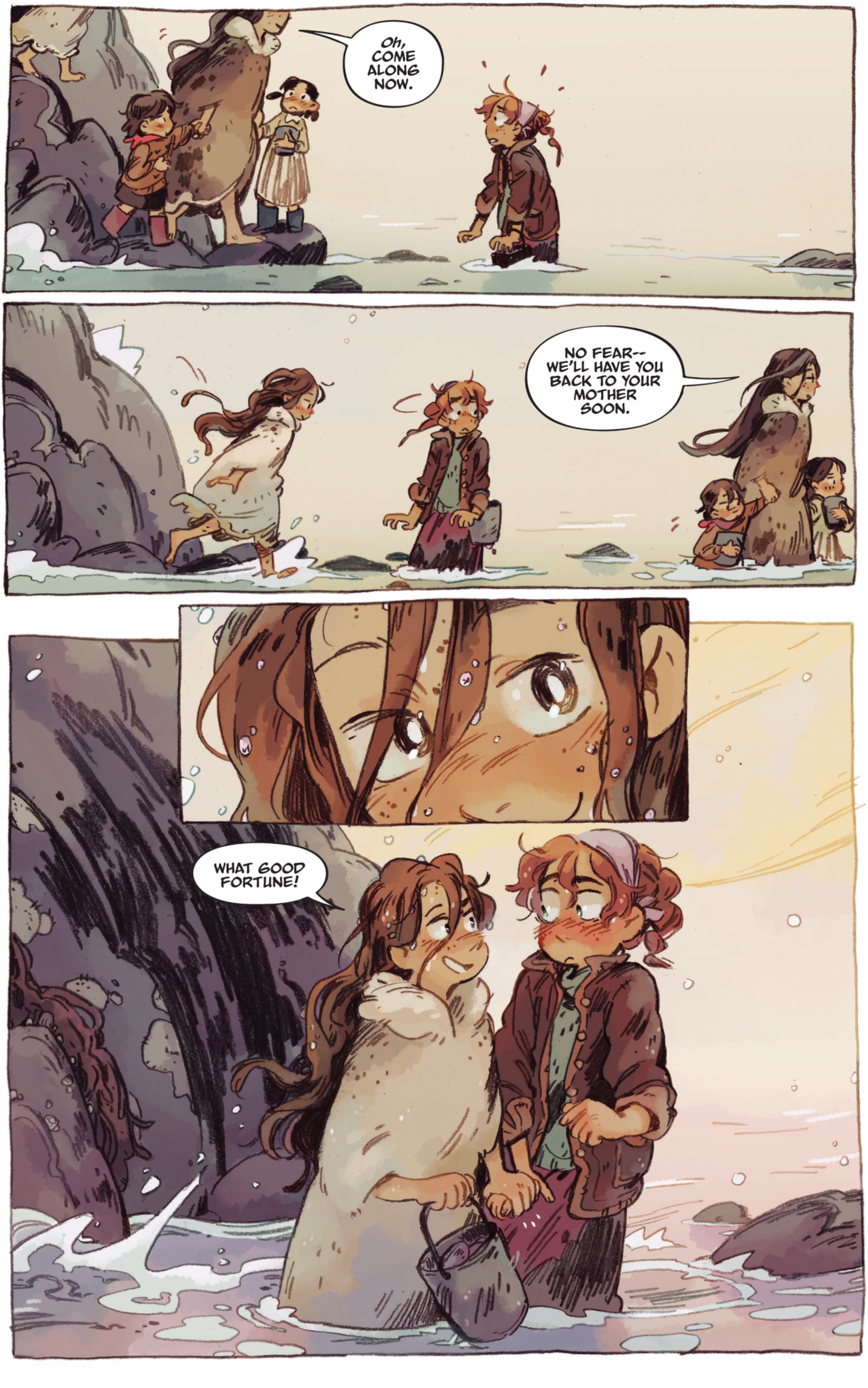

BRYCEN?
BRY!
WHAT'S THAT?
ARK ARK!
ARK
ARK!
ARK!
ARK!
BRY--THANK GOODNESS!

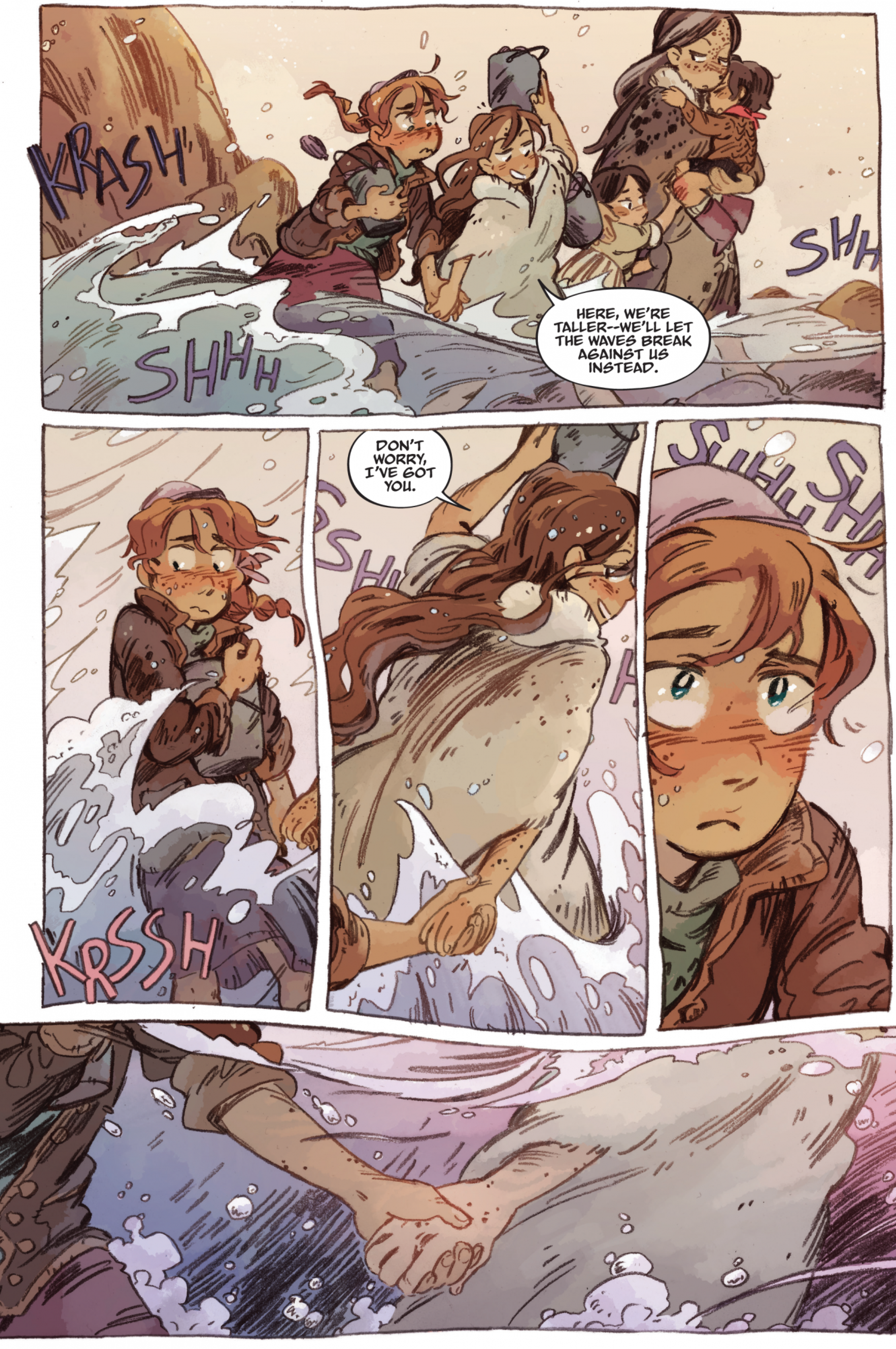

CAN YOU WALK?
OK, I CAN CARRY YOU, BUT WE HAVE TO GET BACK ACROSS--
MY BUCKET!
OK, THAT TOO.
ANNA!
UGH.
PLISH
...WHERE'D THE TRINK GO?

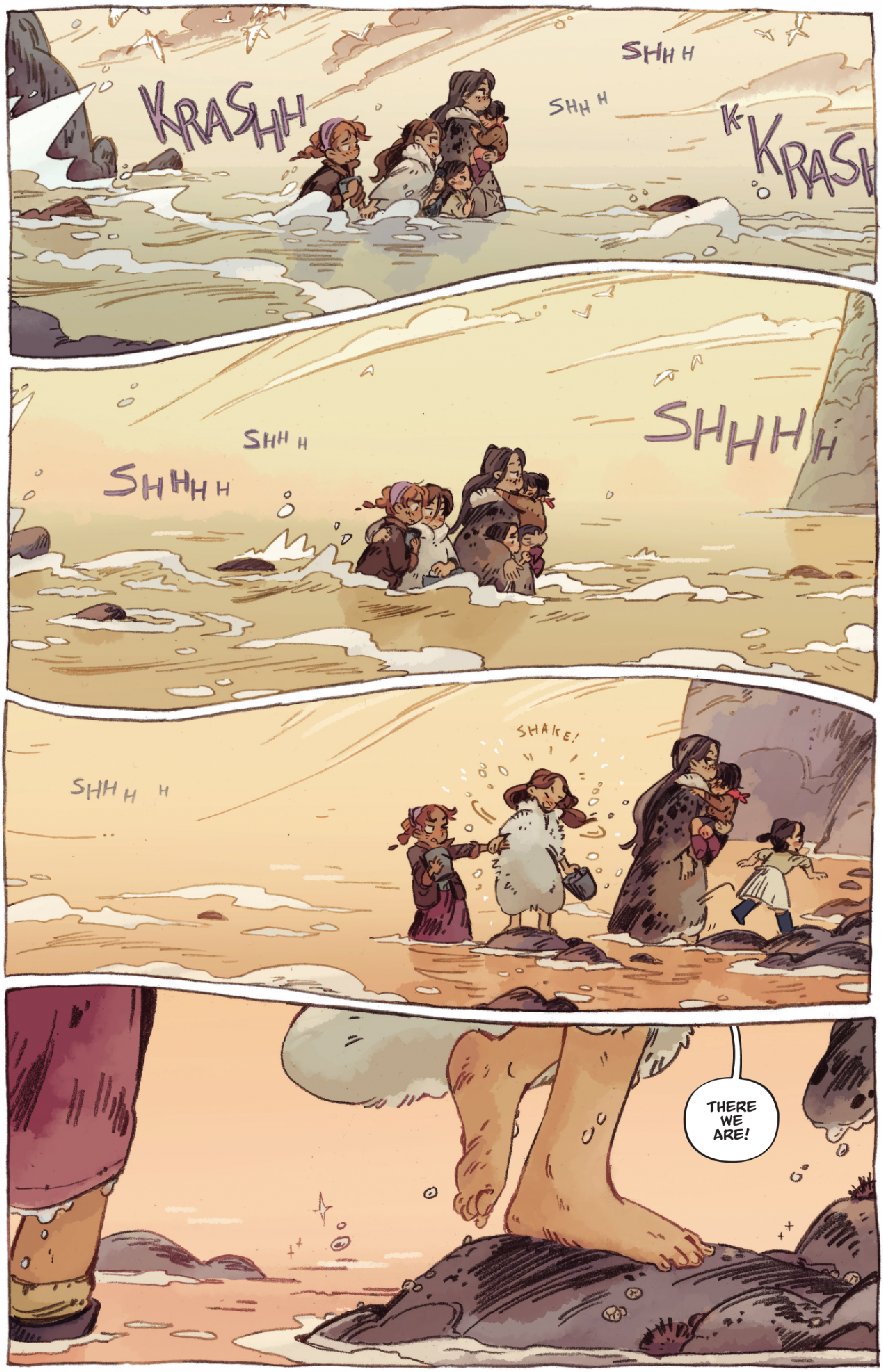

THE TRINK'S RIGHT HERE, JUST A LITTLE WATER OVER IT.
YOU'LL GET WET, BUT THEN WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY HOME TO WARM UP.
C'MON NOW.
SSH
SHH
oof
Eek!
KRASH
WILLA!
IT'S OK!
YOU JUST HAVE TO HOLD TIGHTER--
SHOULD I LEAVE HER AND JUST TAKE BRY ACROSS?

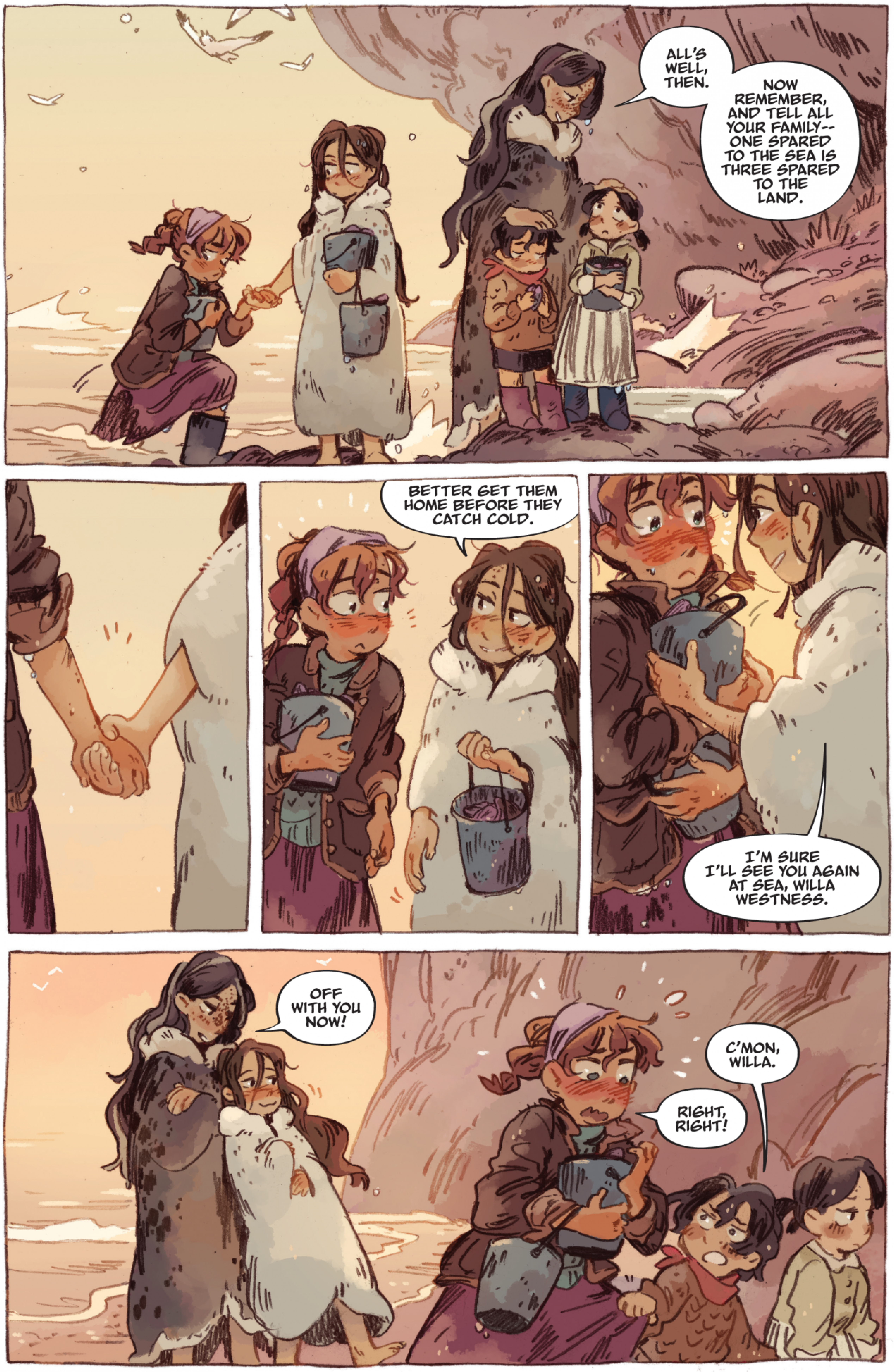

NO! I'M STAYING UP HERE!
ANNABELLE--
THERE'S NOT TIME FOR ME TO CARRY YOU TOO, THE WATER WILL GET TOO HIGH FOR US TO MAKE IT BACK--
"KRASH"
NO, BRY!
ARK!
ARK ARK!
IF WE STAY HERE, WE'RE ALL GOING TO DROWN!
SHOULD I CROSS BACK WHILE I STILL CAN?
YOU BOTH HAVE TO COME WITH ME, NOW.
ARK
SSSH
I CAN'T.
PLEASE.
SSSH

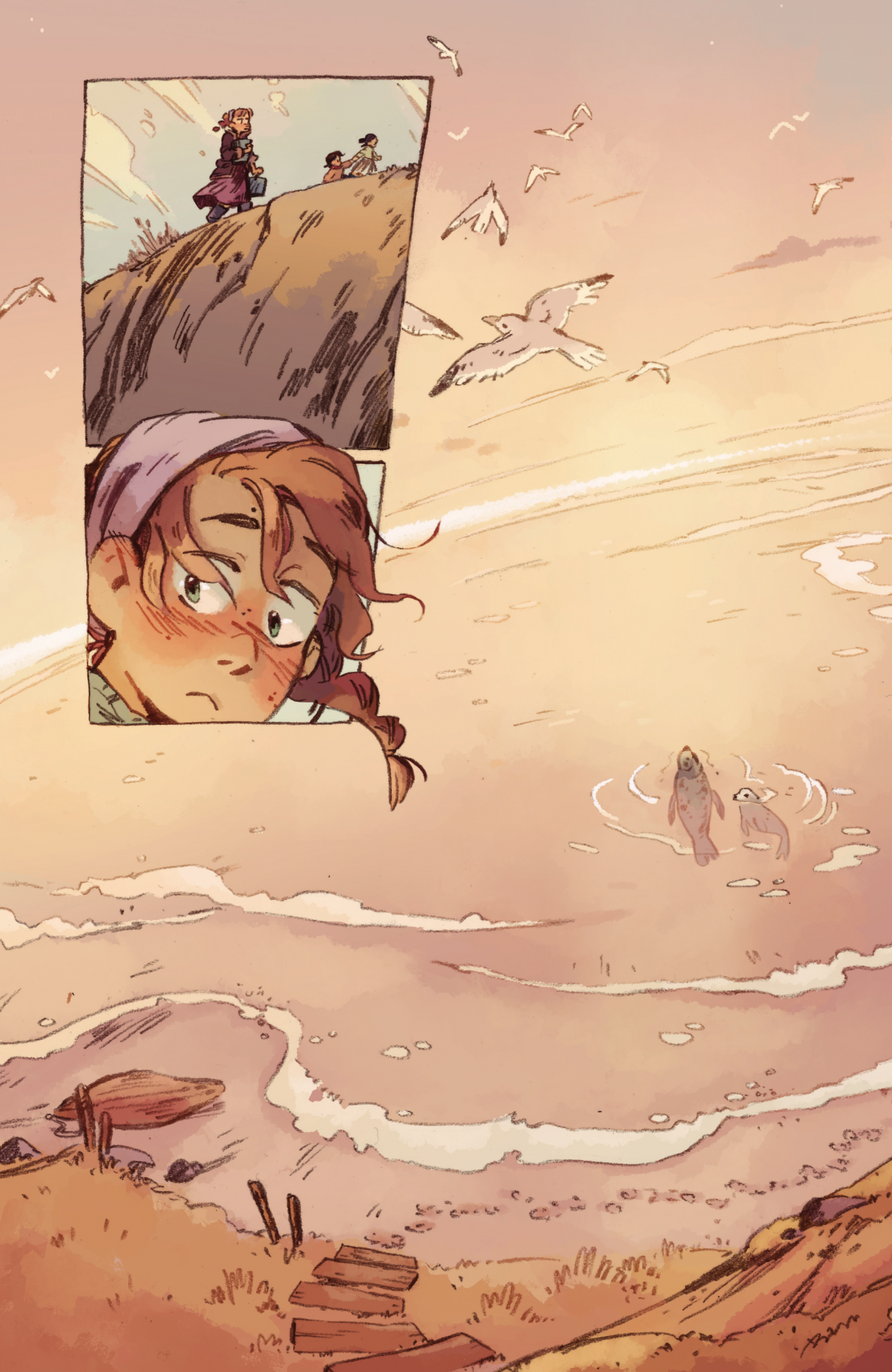

WELL, NO TIME TO WASTE HERE!
BEST GET GOING, *eh?*

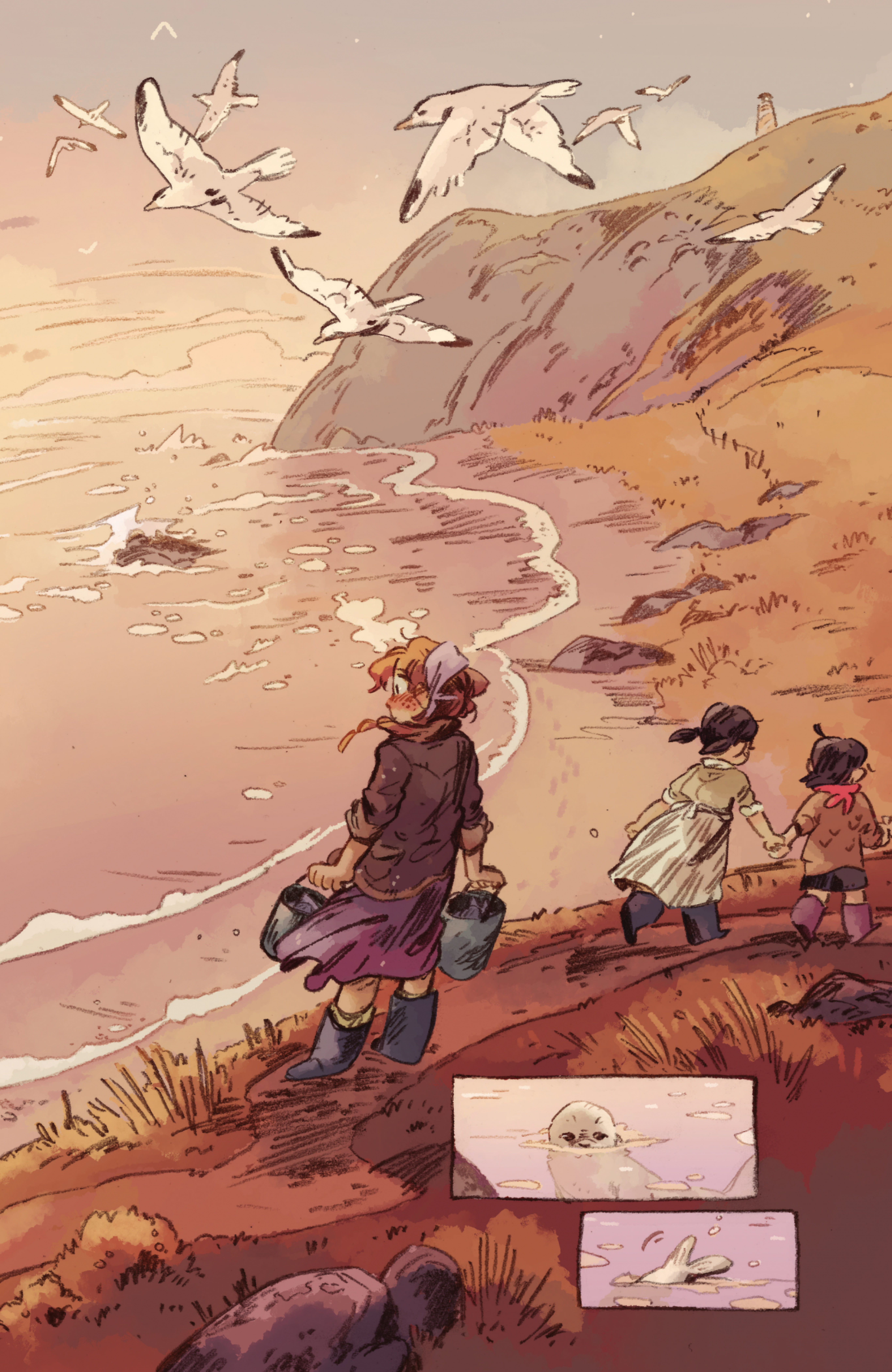

Oh, COME ALONG NOW.
NO FEAR-- WE'LL HAVE YOU BACK TO YOUR MOTHER SOON.
WHAT GOOD FORTUNE!

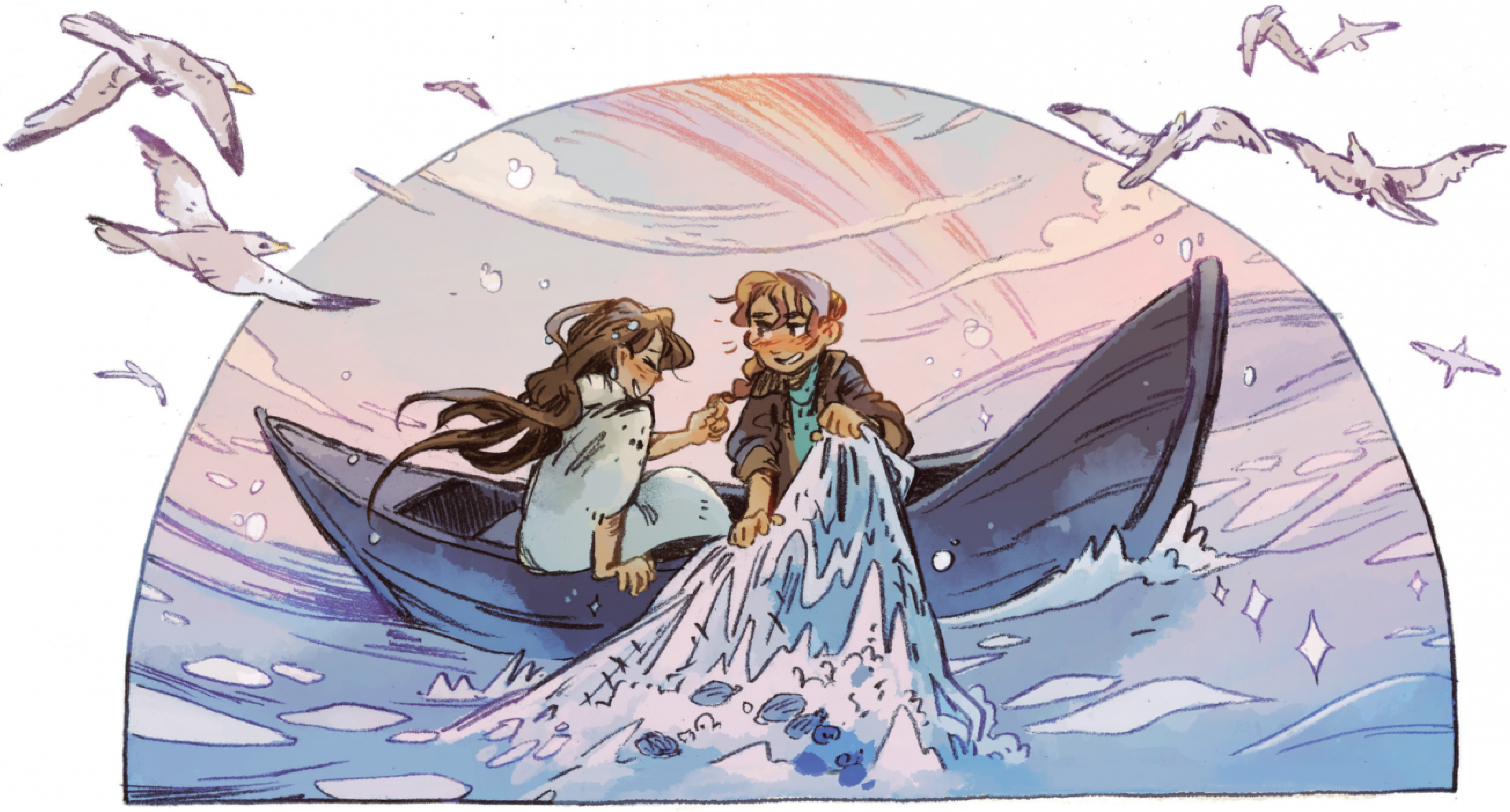

KRASH
SHH
SHHH
HERE, WE'RE TALLER--WE'LL LET THE WAVES BREAK AGAINST US INSTEAD.
KRSSH
DON'T WORRY, I'VE GOT YOU.
SHH
SHHHH

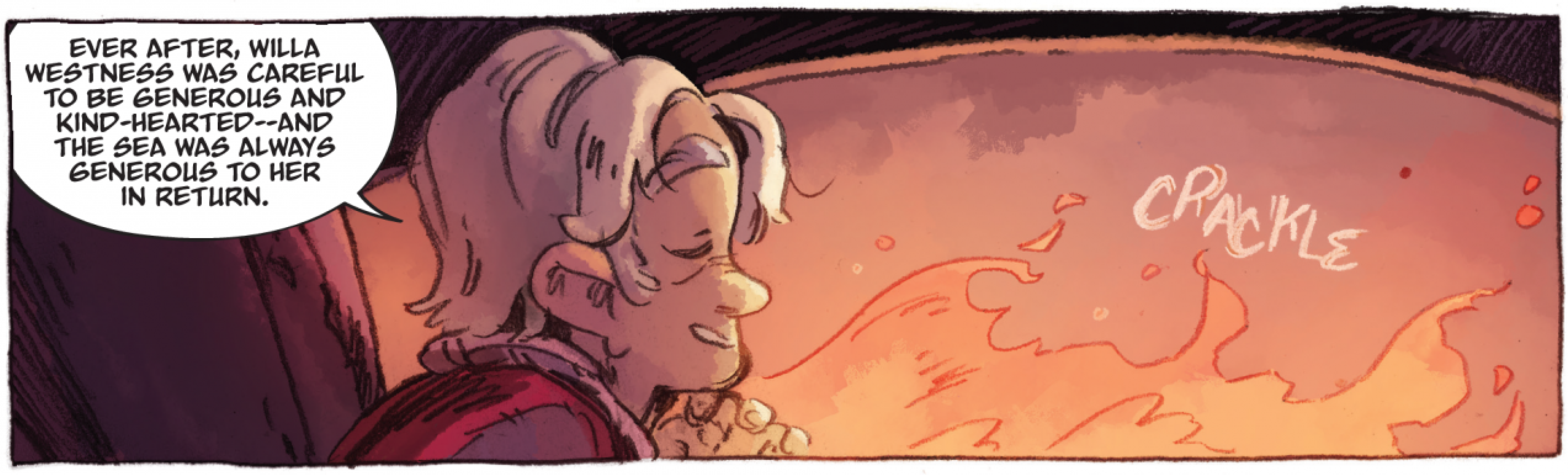

KRASHH
SHHH
SHHH
K-KRASH
SHHHHH
SHHHH
SHHHHH
SHHHH
SHAKE!
THERE WE ARE!

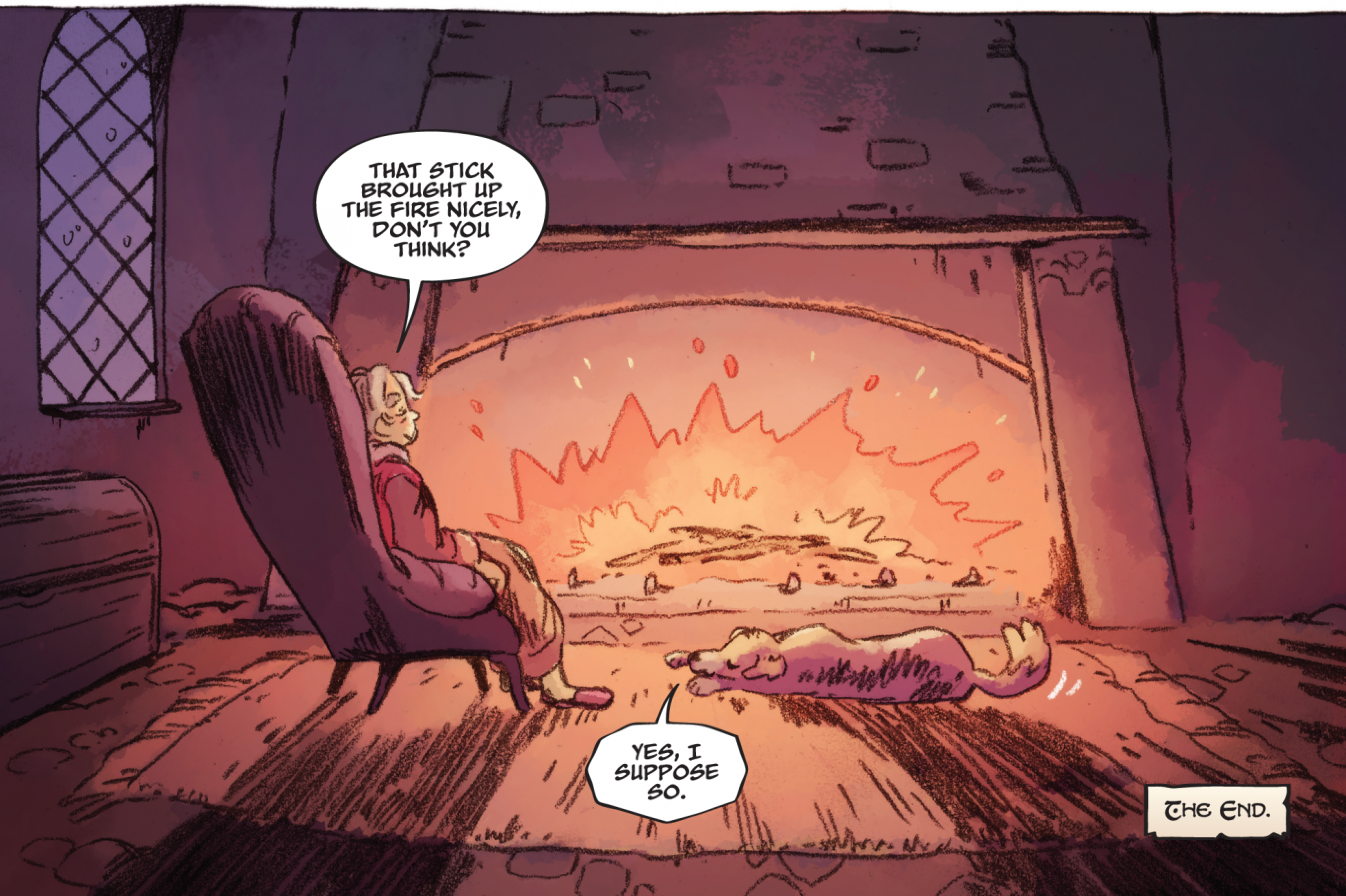

ALL'S WELL, THEN.
NOW REMEMBER, AND TELL ALL YOUR FAMILY-- ONE SPARED TO THE SEA IS THREE SPARED TO THE LAND.
BETTER GET THEM HOME BEFORE THEY CATCH COLD.
I'M SURE I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN AT SEA, WILLA WESTNESS.
OFF WITH YOU NOW!
C'MON, WILLA.
RIGHT, RIGHT!





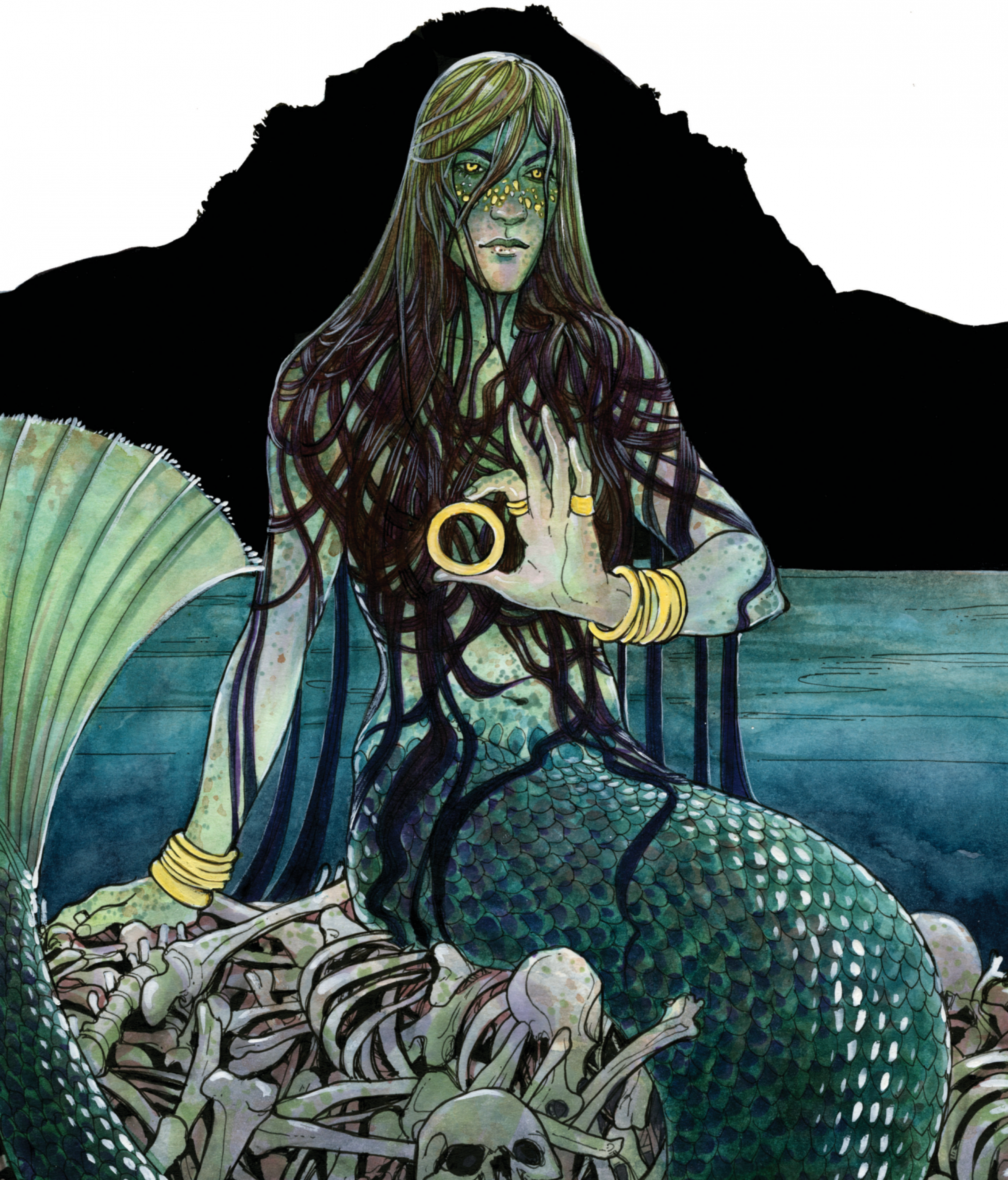



EVER AFTER, WILLA WESTNESS WAS CAREFUL TO BE GENEROUS AND KIND-HEARTED--AND THE SEA WAS ALWAYS GENEROUS TO HER IN RETURN.
CRACKLE


THAT STICK BROUGHT UP THE FIRE NICELY, DON'T YOU THINK?
YES, I SUPPOSE SO.
THE END.

TALE FOUR COVER

AUD KOCH



LORELEI

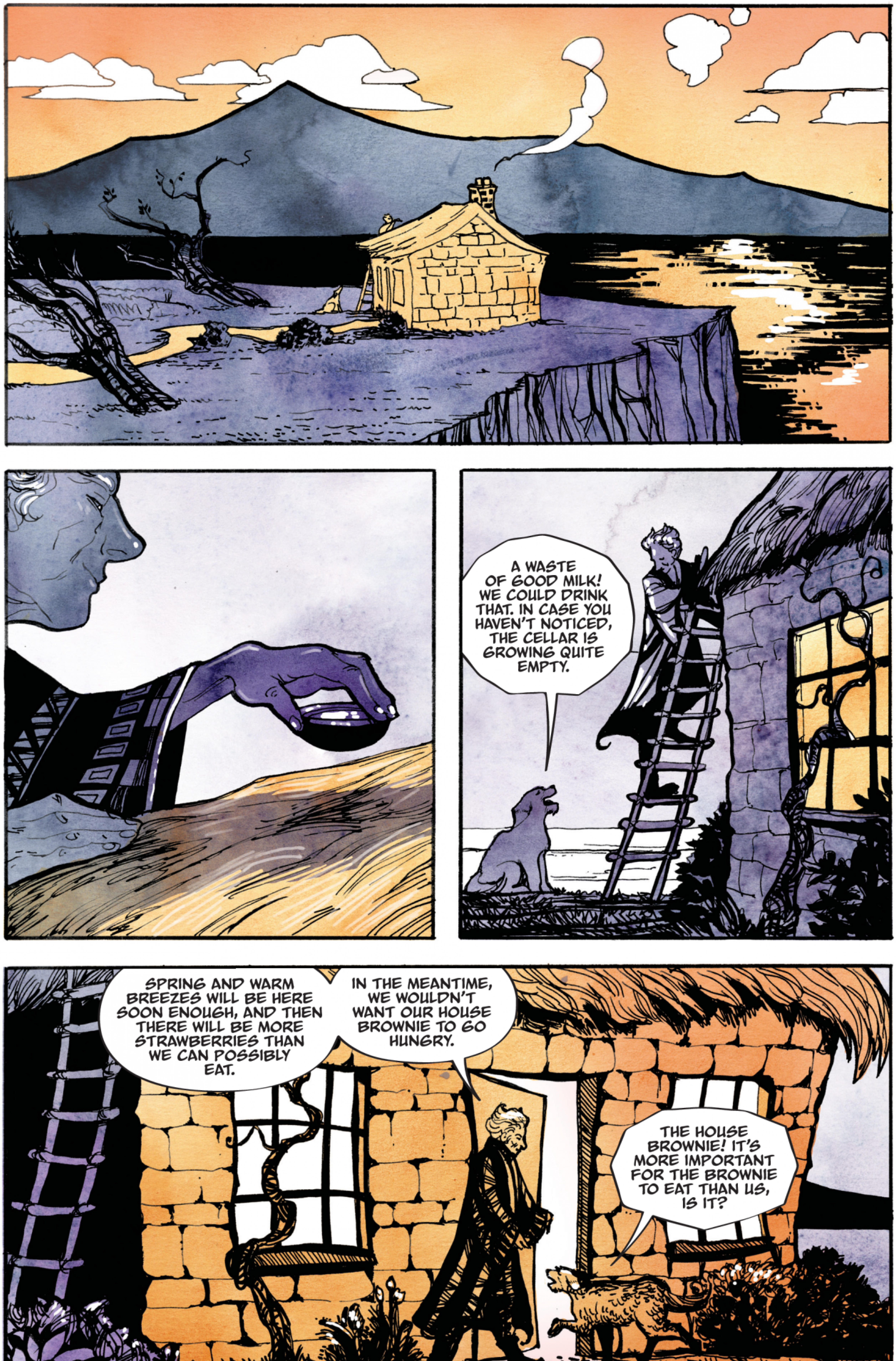
DAUGHTER *of the* RHINE

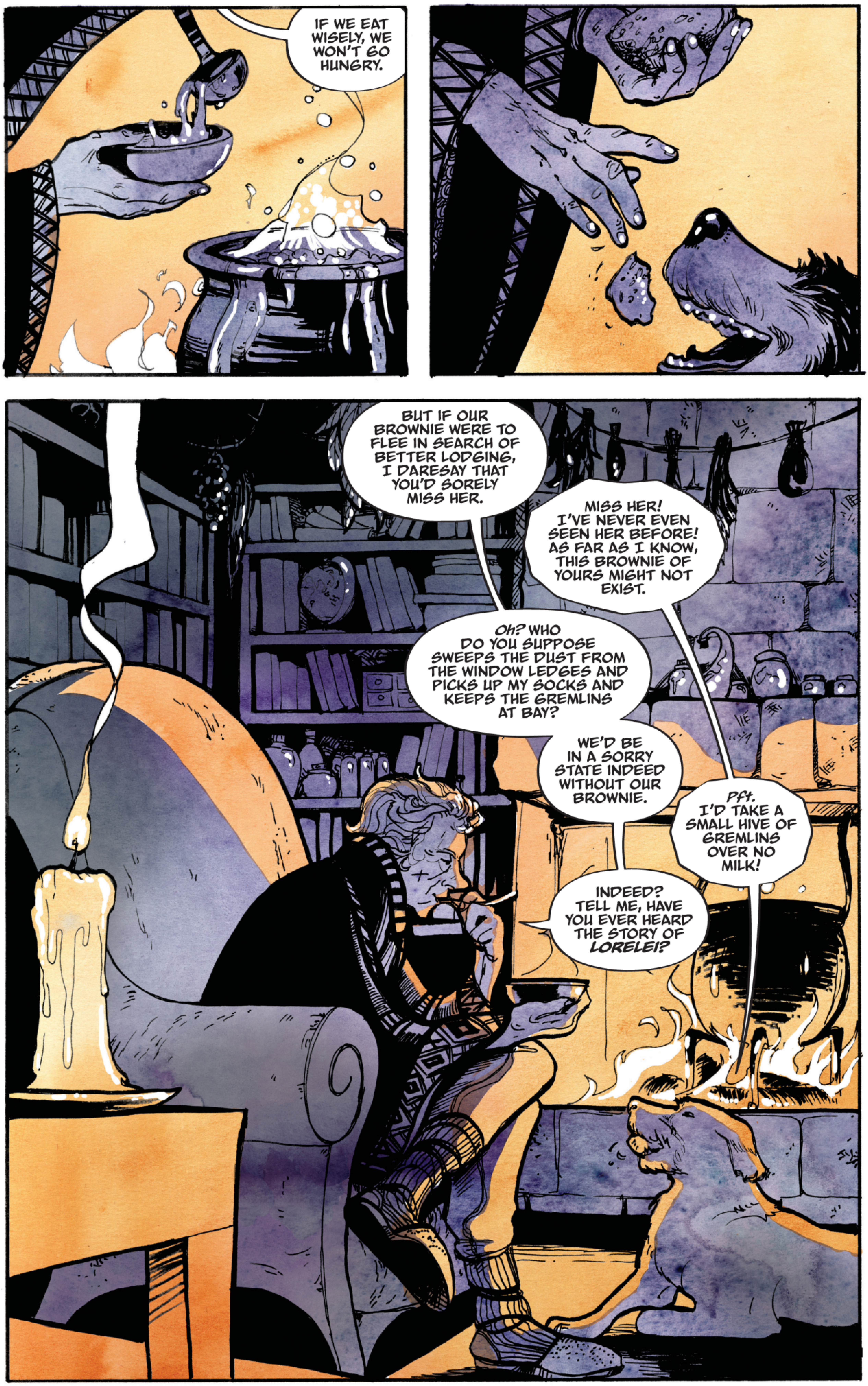
In the heart of Germany, within the Rhine Gorge, the river curves around the Cliff of Lorelei. The water murmurs against this cliff, echoing like voices, and German folklore has crafted many differing stories to explain the noise. In old legends, the sound was ascribed to dwarves who lived in the cliffs, but two centuries ago, the myth of Lorelei rose to prominence. There are various versions of this myth, but the common thread in (most of) them is that Lorelei is a siren who sits singing at the bottom of the cliffs and her song distracts passing sailors. They die in shipwrecks and, depending on the version of the myth, Lorelei is either oblivious or vindictive.

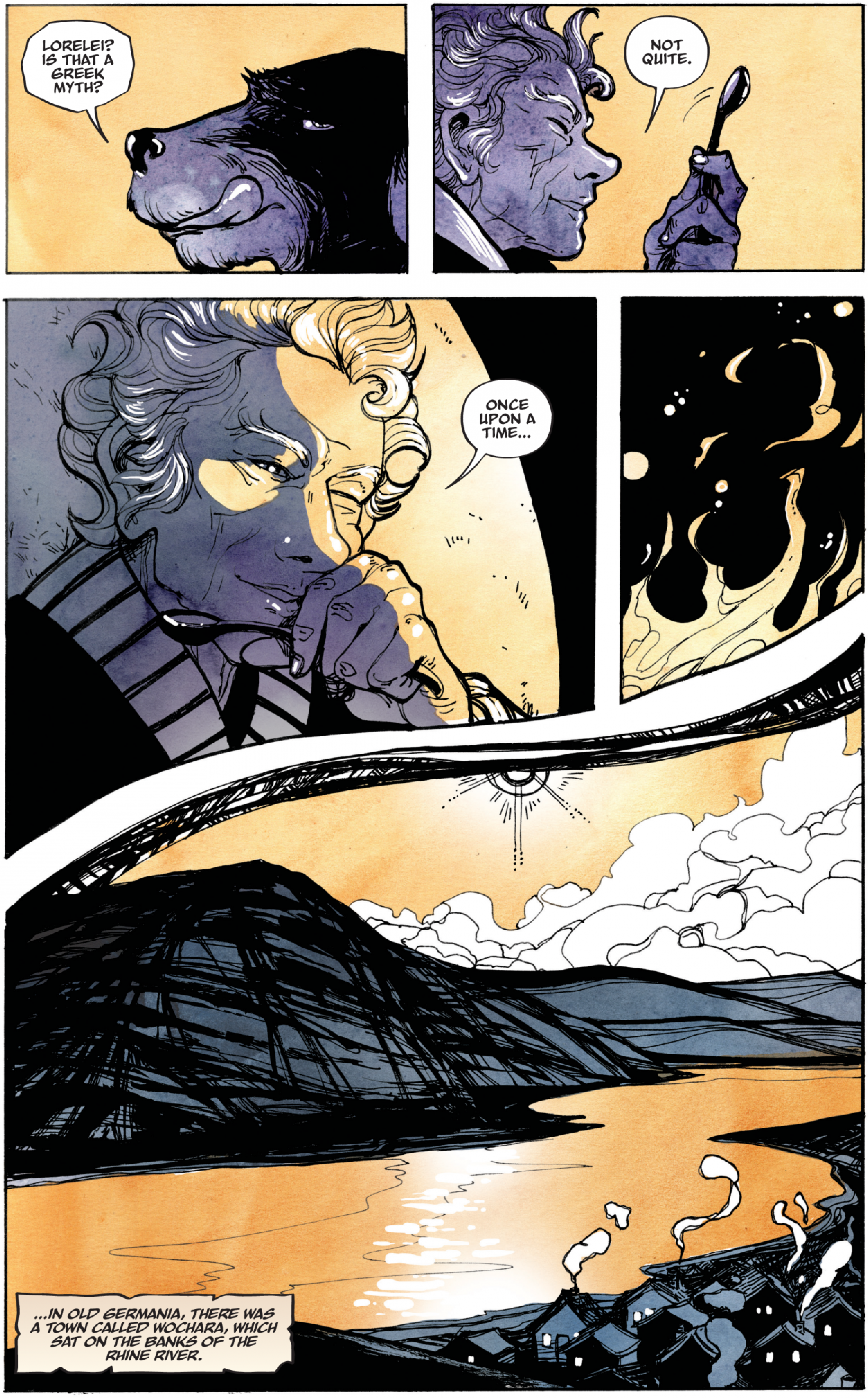
This seems to be the general trend in myths about sirens: The sailors are gruff, heroic men and the beautiful, sneering sirens take their lives. "That's all well and good (if rather boring)," I thought to myself when I first read the tale of Lorelei, "but if Lorelei takes, I wonder what she gives in return." And suddenly there was a story flowing out of my pen.

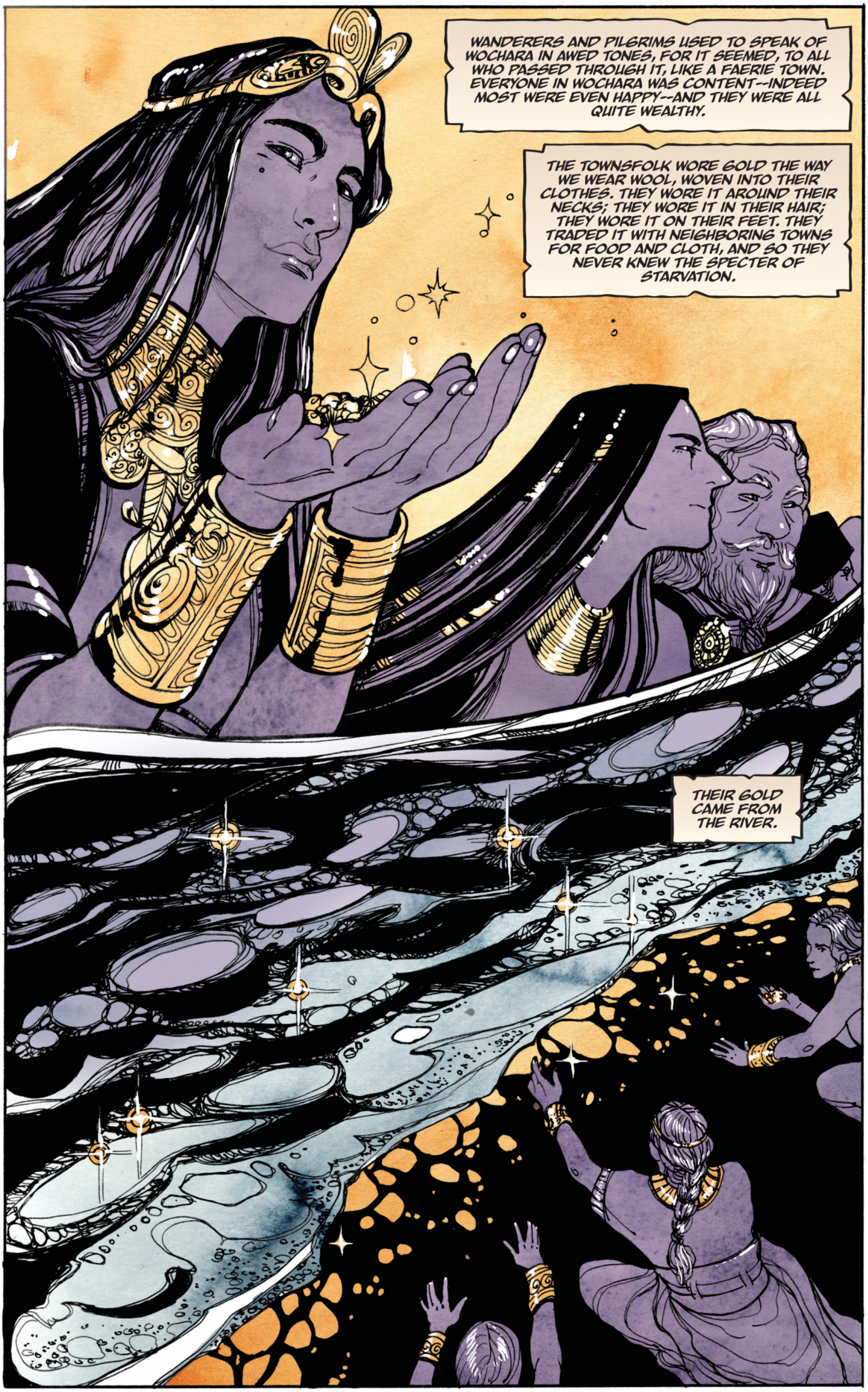
My version of Lorelei is only loosely inspired by the classic tales. I've made her my own, which I believe is the basic purpose of our mythologies: A myth exists as a lump of clay for you to carve and mold to your own tastes; it exists as the scaffolding upon which you can build your own version of truth, whatever it may be. So here's a little bit of my own truth: Be careful what you take; be careful if you are not willing to give anything in return. Amen.

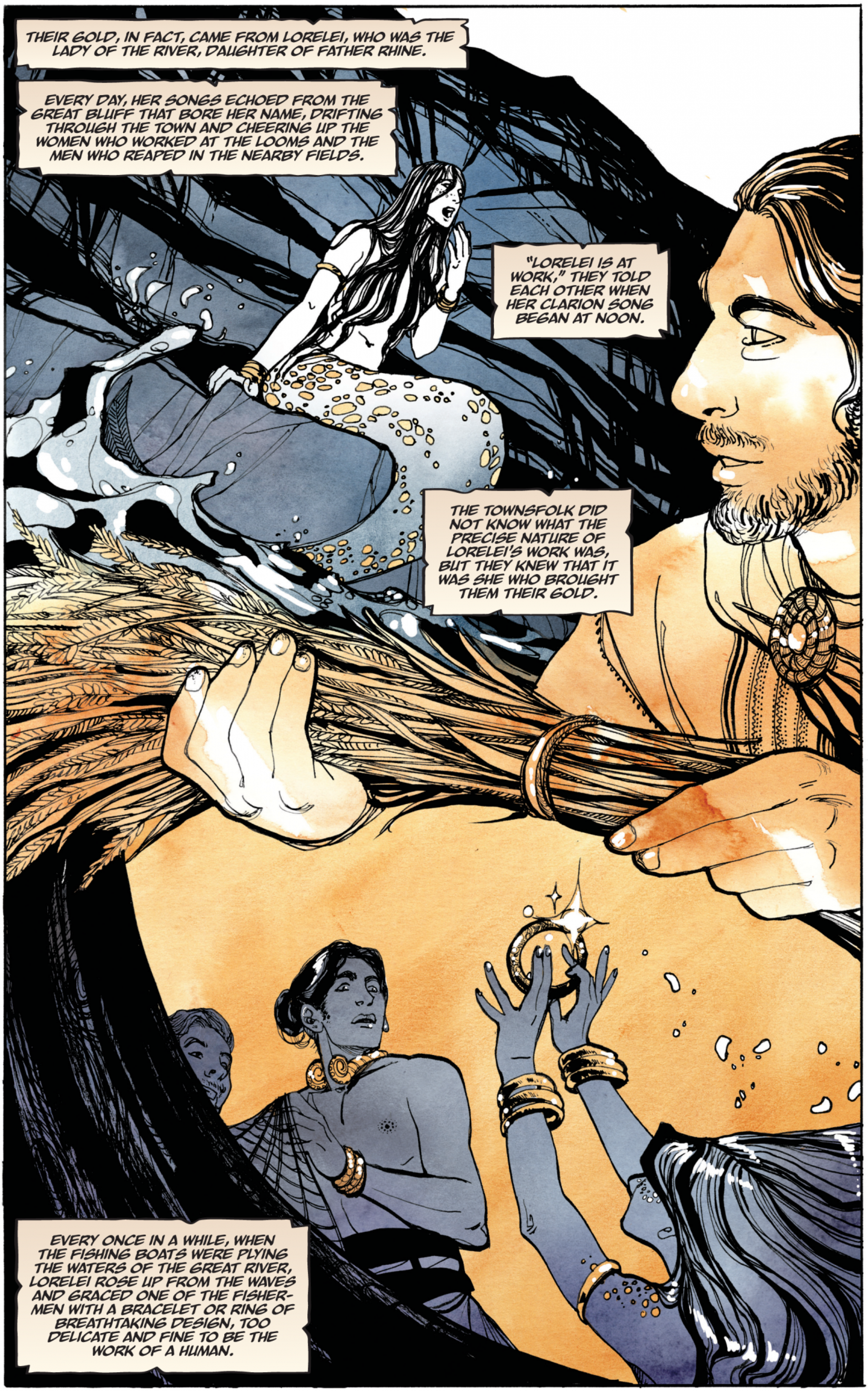
– Aud Koch

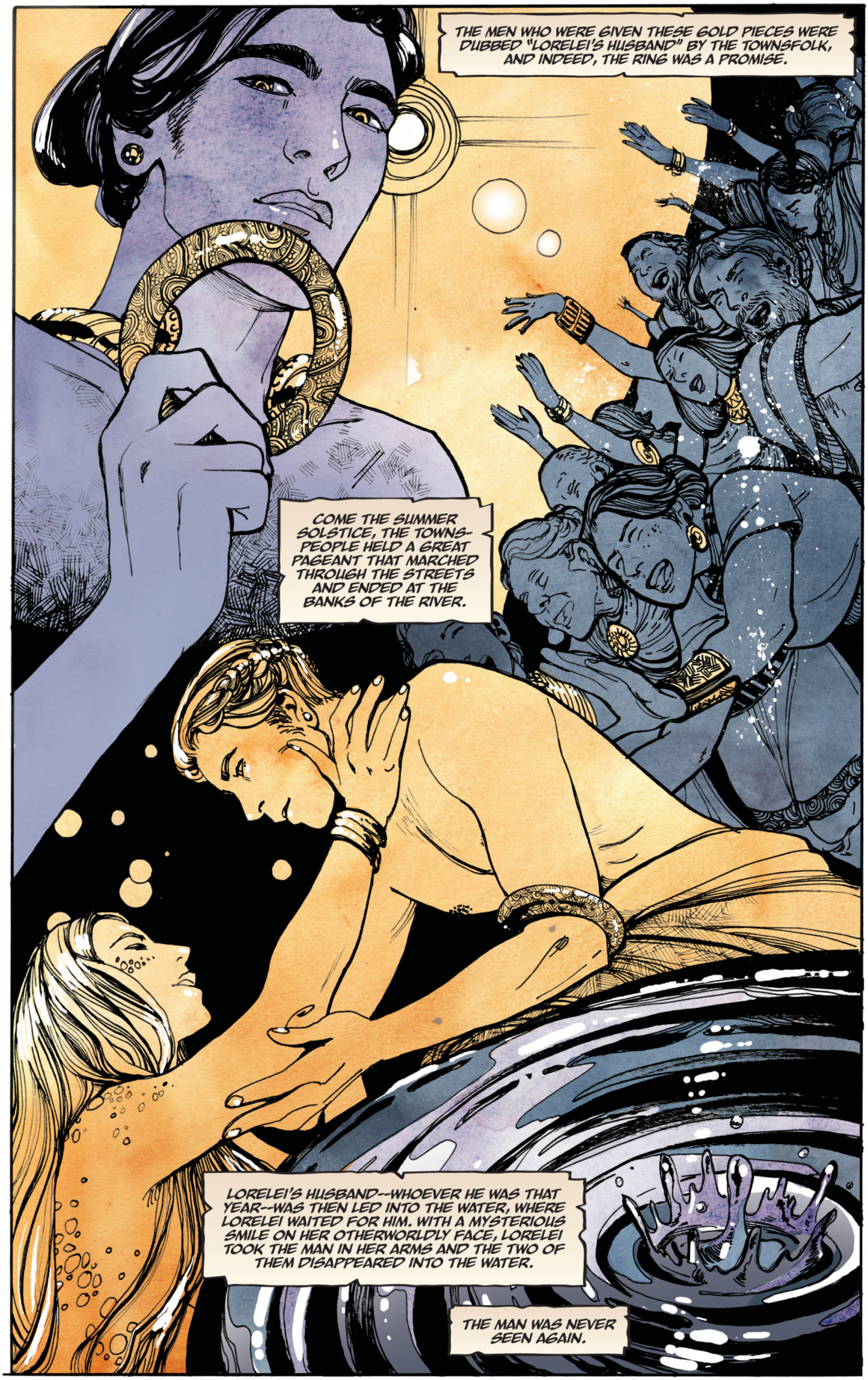

A WASTE OF GOOD MILK! WE COULD DRINK THAT. IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, THE CELLAR IS GROWING QUITE EMPTY.
SPRING AND WARM BREEZES WILL BE HERE SOON ENOUGH, AND THEN THERE WILL BE MORE STRAWBERRIES THAN WE CAN POSSIBLY EAT.
IN THE MEANTIME, WE WOULDN'T WANT OUR HOUSE BROWNIE TO GO HUNGRY.
THE HOUSE BROWNIE! IT'S MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE BROWNIE TO EAT THAN US, IS IT?

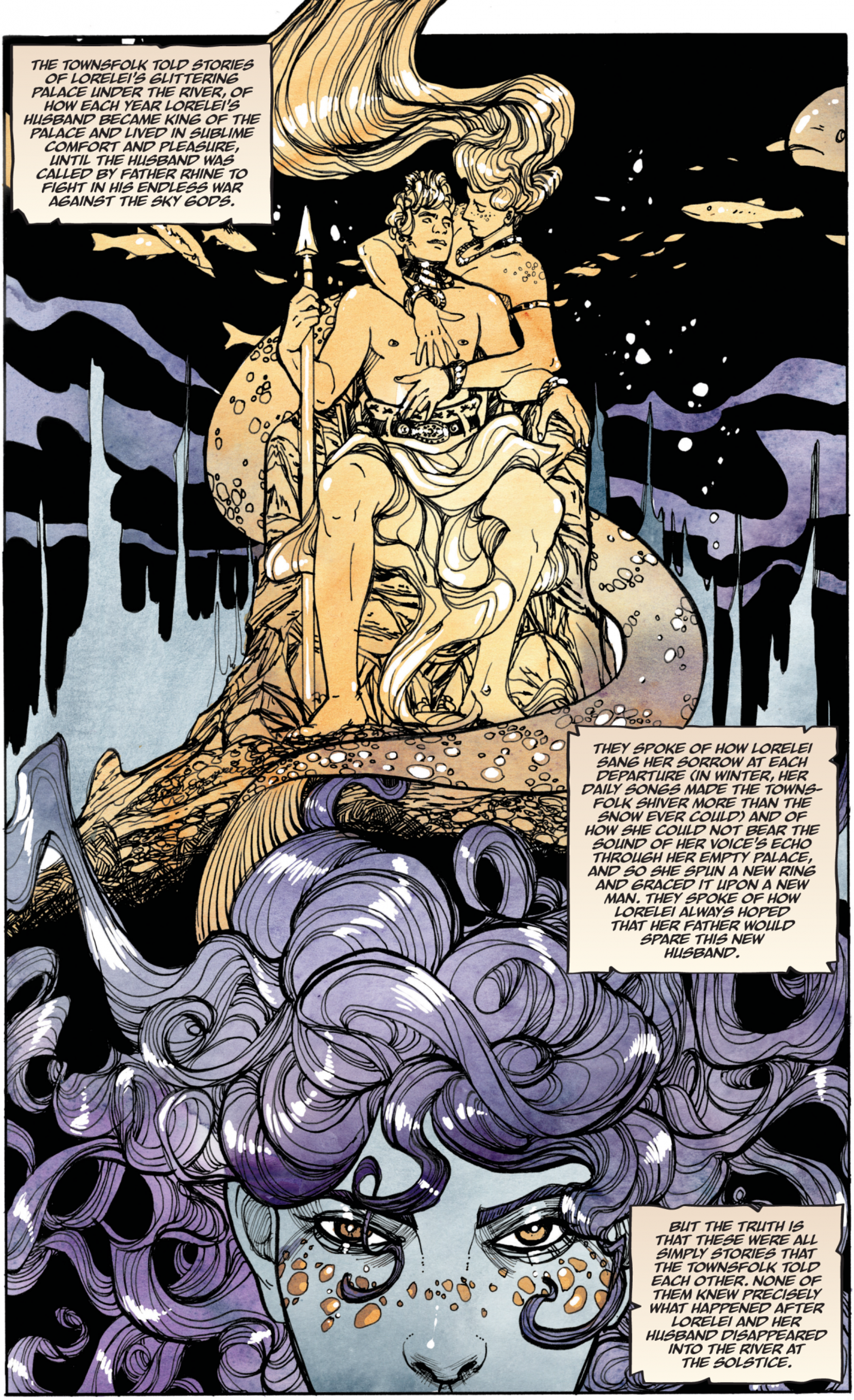

IF WE EAT WISELY, WE WON'T GO HUNGRY.
BUT IF OUR BROWNIE WERE TO FLEE IN SEARCH OF BETTER LODGING, I DARESAY THAT YOU'D SORELY MISS HER.
MISS HER! I'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN HER BEFORE! AS FAR AS I KNOW, THIS BROWNIE OF YOURS MIGHT NOT EXIST.
OH? WHO DO YOU SUPPOSE SWEEPS THE DUST FROM THE WINDOW LEDGES AND PICKS UP MY SOCKS AND KEEPS THE GREMLINS AT BAY?
WE'D BE IN A SORRY STATE INDEED WITHOUT OUR BROWNIE.
PFT. I'D TAKE A SMALL HIVE OF GREMLINS OVER NO MILK!
INDEED? TELL ME, HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE STORY OF ***LORELEI?***

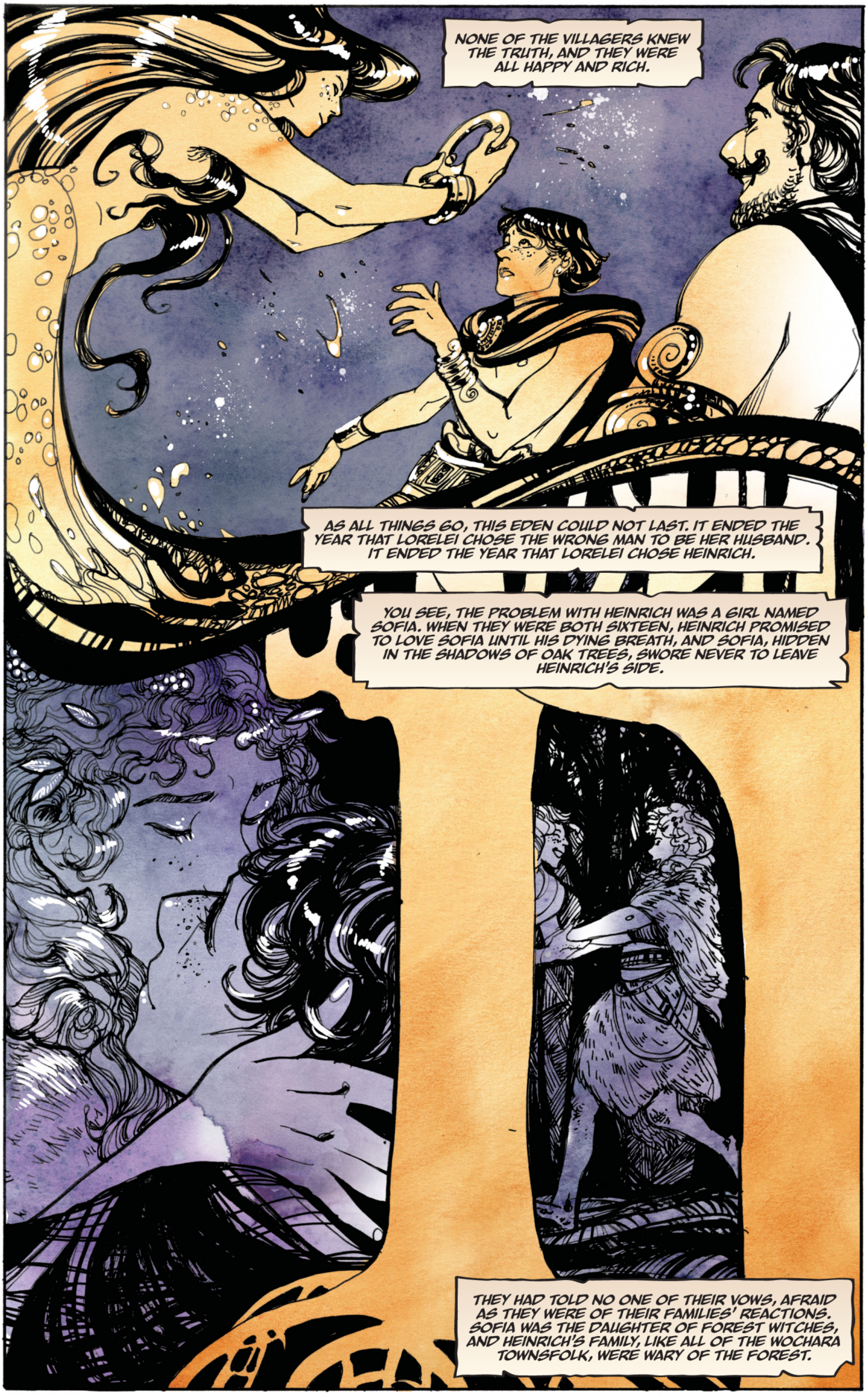

LORELEI? IS THAT A GREEK MYTH?
NOT QUITE.
ONCE UPON A TIME...
...IN OLD GERMANIA, THERE WAS A TOWN CALLED WOCHARA, WHICH SAT ON THE BANKS OF THE RHINE RIVER.

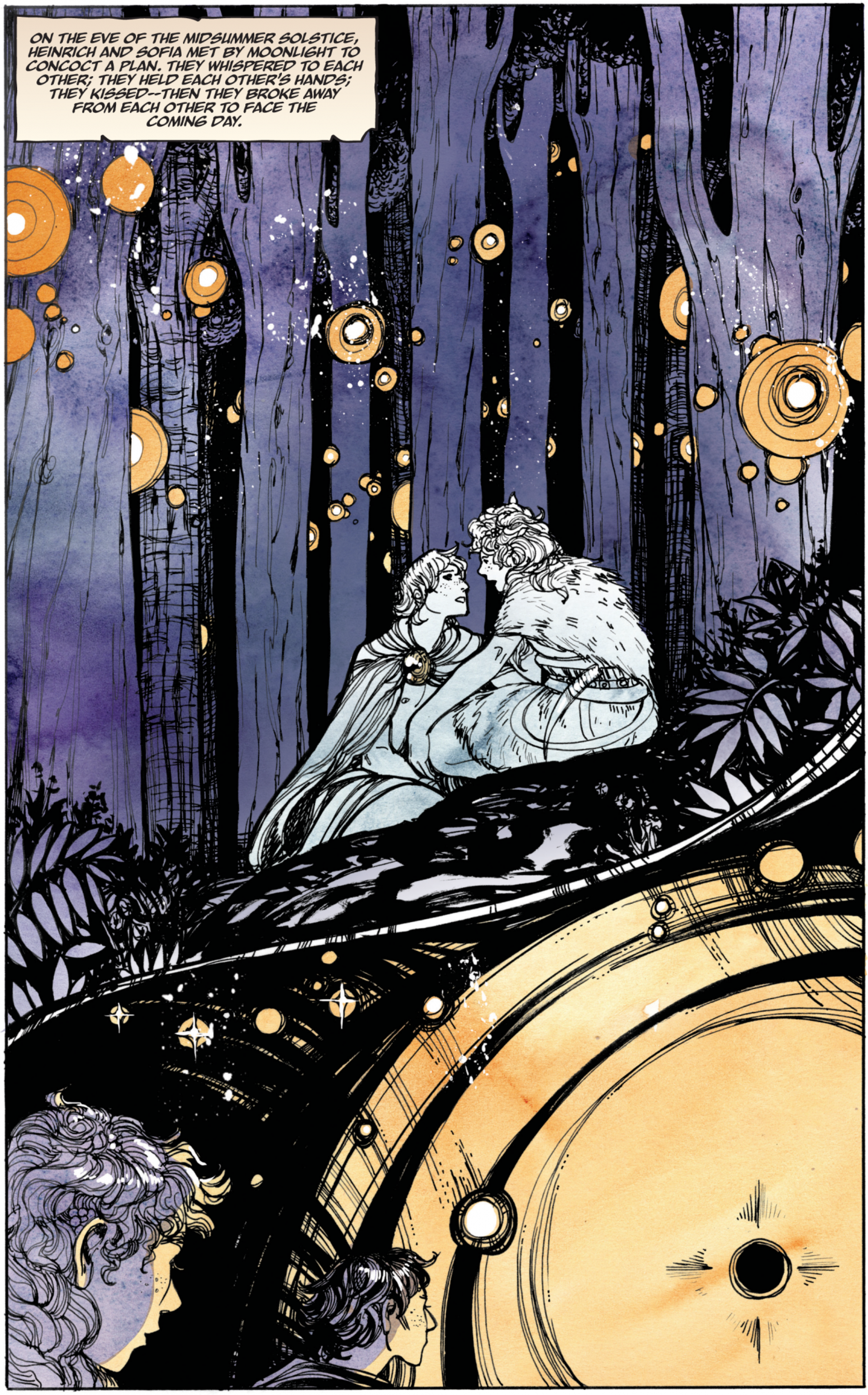

WANDERERS AND PILGRIMS USED TO SPEAK OF WOCHARA IN AWED TONES, FOR IT SEEMED, TO ALL WHO PASSED THROUGH IT, LIKE A FAERIE TOWN. EVERYONE IN WOCHARA WAS CONTENT--INDEED MOST WERE EVEN HAPPY--AND THEY WERE ALL QUITE WEALTHY.
THE TOWNSFOLK WORE GOLD THE WAY WE WEAR WOOL, WOVEN INTO THEIR CLOTHES. THEY WORE IT AROUND THEIR NECKS; THEY WORE IT IN THEIR HAIR; THEY WORE IT ON THEIR FEET. THEY TRADED IT WITH NEIGHBORING TOWNS FOR FOOD AND CLOTH, AND SO THEY NEVER KNEW THE SPECTER OF STARVATION.
THEIR GOLD CAME FROM THE RIVER.

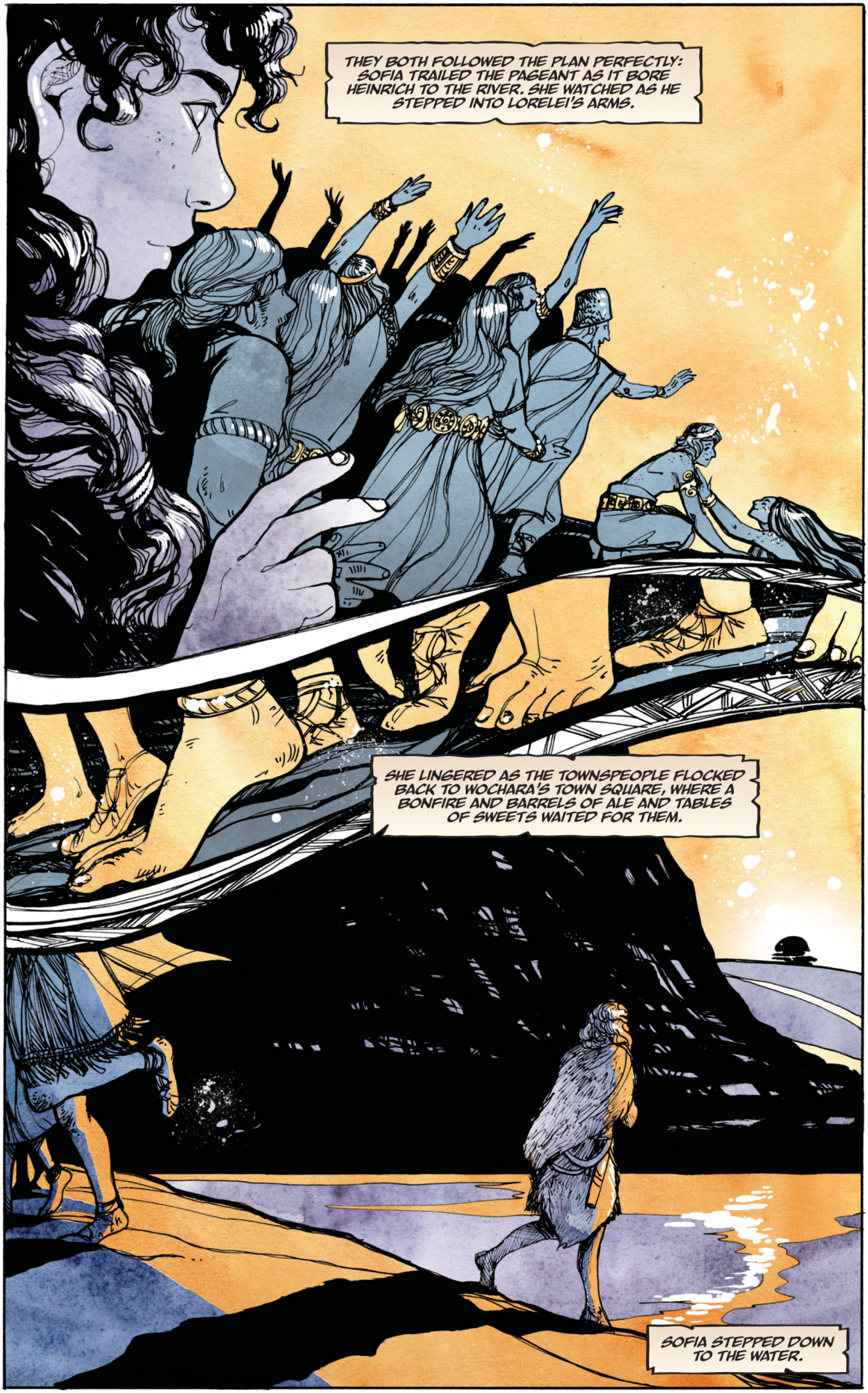

THEIR GOLD, IN FACT, CAME FROM LORELEI, WHO WAS THE LADY OF THE RIVER, DAUGHTER OF FATHER RHINE.
EVERY DAY, HER SONGS ECHOED FROM THE GREAT BLUFF THAT BORE HER NAME, DRIFTING THROUGH THE TOWN AND CHEERING UP THE WOMEN WHO WORKED AT THE LOOMS AND THE MEN WHO REAPED IN THE NEARBY FIELDS.
"LORELEI IS AT WORK," THEY TOLD EACH OTHER WHEN HER CLARION SONG BEGAN AT NOON.
THE TOWNSFOLK DID NOT KNOW WHAT THE PRECISE NATURE OF LORELEI'S WORK WAS, BUT THEY KNEW THAT IT WAS SHE WHO BROUGHT THEM THEIR GOLD.
EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, WHEN THE FISHING BOATS WERE PLYING THE WATERS OF THE GREAT RIVER, LORELEI ROSE UP FROM THE WAVES AND GRACED ONE OF THE FISHERMEN WITH A BRACELET OR RING OF BREATHTAKING DESIGN, TOO DELICATE AND FINE TO BE THE WORK OF A HUMAN.

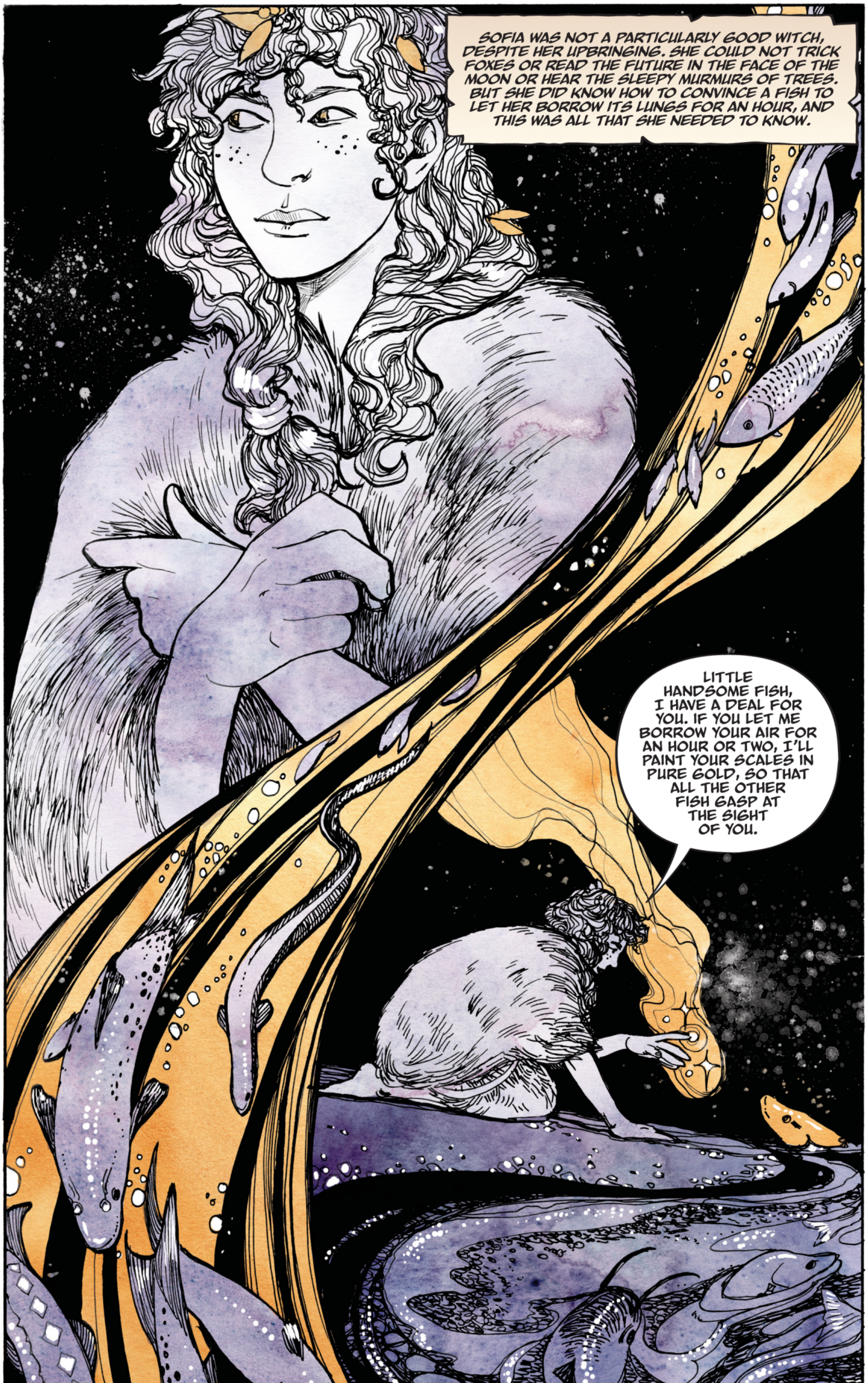

THE MEN WHO WERE GIVEN THESE GOLD PIECES WERE DUBBED "LORELEI'S HUSBAND" BY THE TOWNSFOLK, AND INDEED, THE RING WAS A PROMISE.
COME THE SUMMER SOLSTICE, THE TOWNSPEOPLE HELD A GREAT PAGEANT THAT MARCHED THROUGH THE STREETS AND ENDED AT THE BANKS OF THE RIVER.
LORELEI'S HUSBAND--WHOEVER HE WAS THAT YEAR--WAS THEN LED INTO THE WATER, WHERE LORELEI WAITED FOR HIM. WITH A MYSTERIOUS SMILE ON HER OTHERWORLDLY FACE, LORELEI TOOK THE MAN IN HER ARMS AND THE TWO OF THEM DISAPPEARED INTO THE WATER.
THE MAN WAS NEVER SEEN AGAIN.

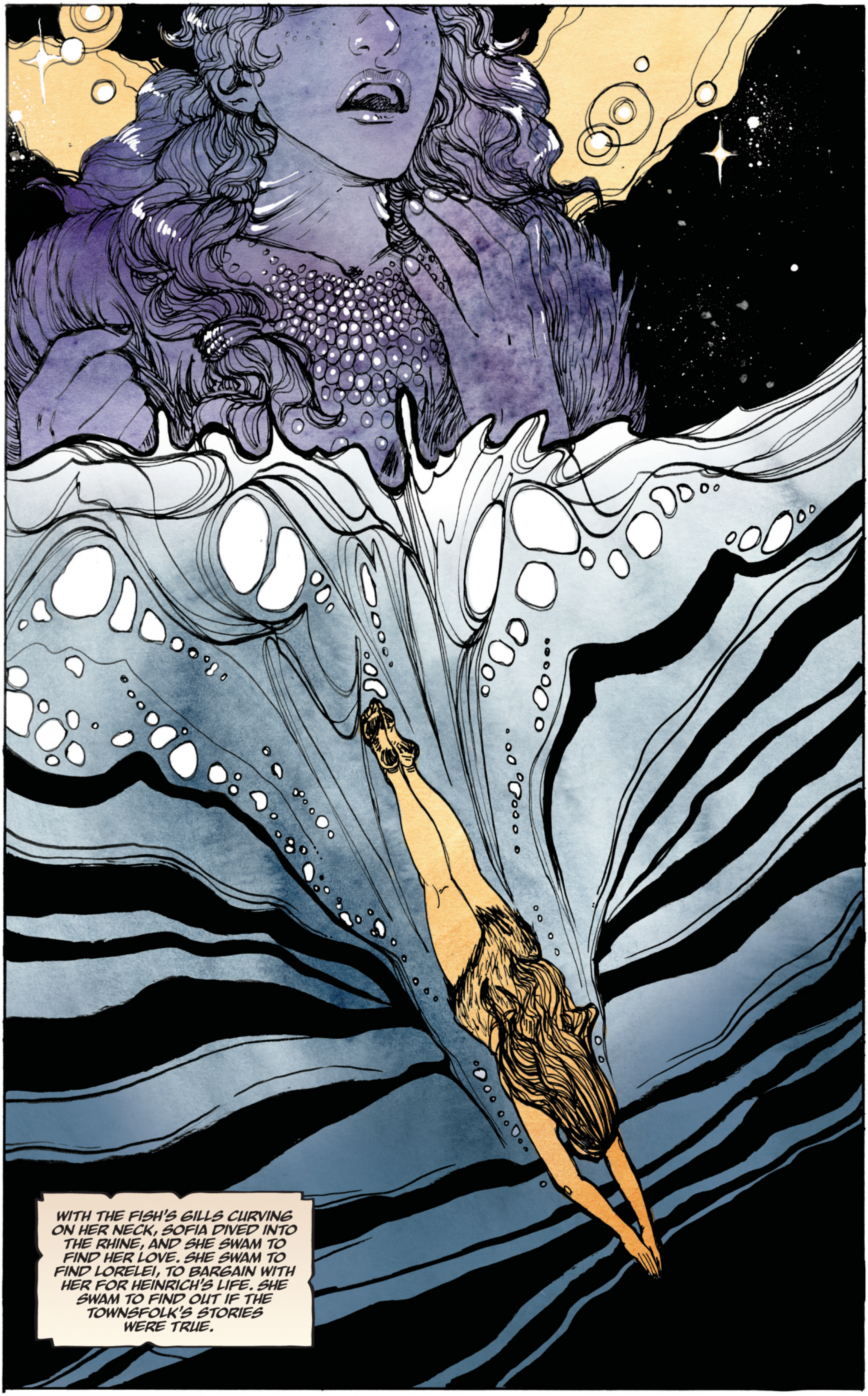

THE TOWNSFOLK TOLD STORIES OF LORELEI'S GLITTERING PALACE UNDER THE RIVER, OF HOW EACH YEAR LORELEI'S HUSBAND BECAME KING OF THE PALACE AND LIVED IN SUBLIME COMFORT AND PLEASURE, UNTIL THE HUSBAND WAS CALLED BY FATHER RHINE TO FIGHT IN HIS ENDLESS WAR AGAINST THE SKY GODS.
THEY SPOKE OF HOW LORELEI SANG HER SORROW AT EACH DEPARTURE (IN WINTER, HER DAILY SONGS MADE THE TOWNSFOLK SHIVER MORE THAN THE SNOW EVER COULD) AND OF HOW SHE COULD NOT BEAR THE SOUND OF HER VOICE'S ECHO THROUGH HER EMPTY PALACE, AND SO SHE SPUN A NEW RING AND GRACED IT UPON A NEW MAN. THEY SPOKE OF HOW LORELEI ALWAYS HOPED THAT HER FATHER WOULD SPARE THIS NEW HUSBAND.
BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT THESE WERE ALL SIMPLY STORIES THAT THE TOWNSFOLK TOLD EACH OTHER. NONE OF THEM KNEW PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENED AFTER LORELEI AND HER HUSBAND DISAPPEARED INTO THE RIVER AT THE SOLSTICE.

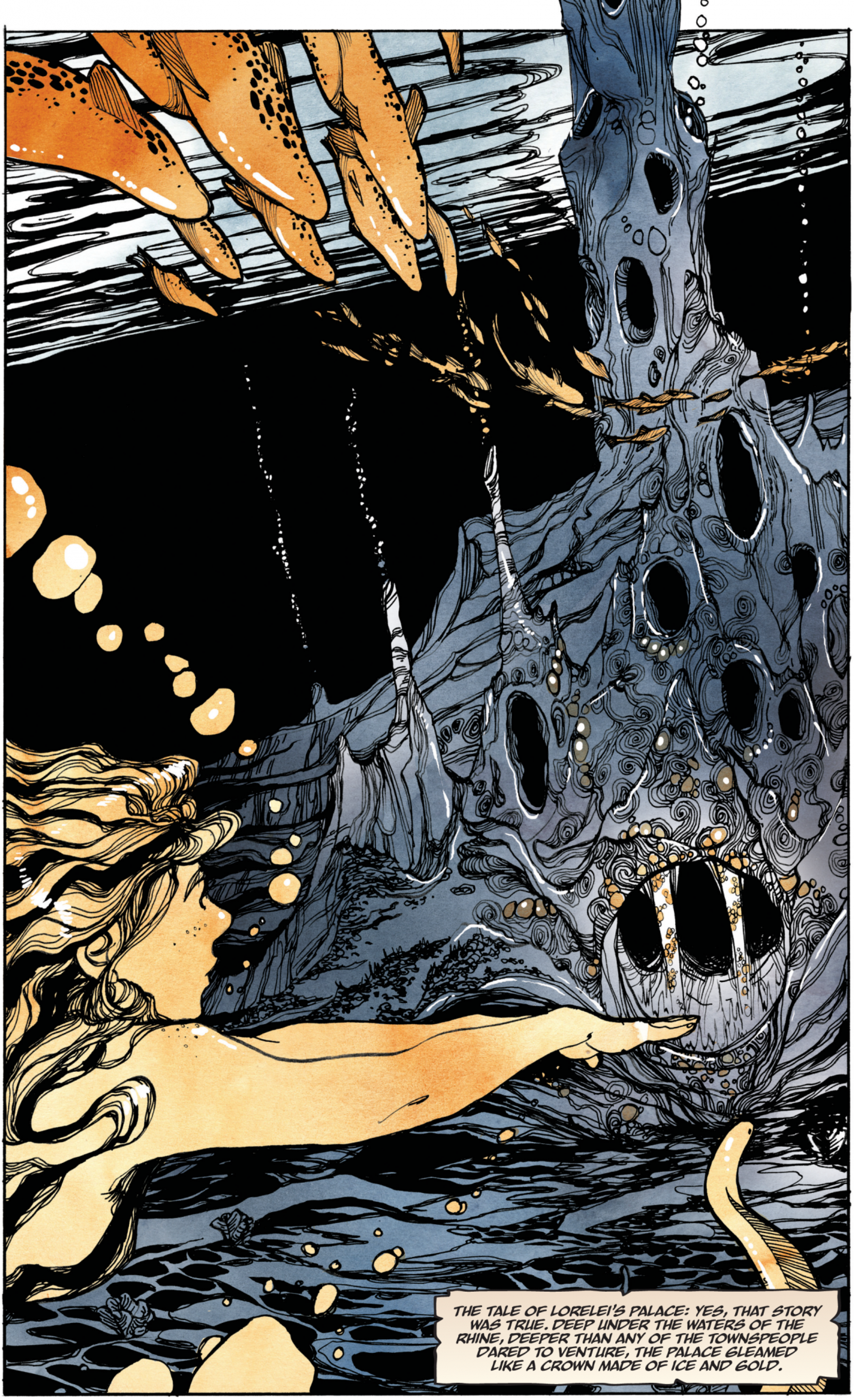

NONE OF THE VILLAGERS KNEW THE TRUTH, AND THEY WERE ALL HAPPY AND RICH.
AS ALL THINGS GO, THIS EDEN COULD NOT LAST. IT ENDED THE YEAR THAT LORELEI CHOSE THE WRONG MAN TO BE HER HUSBAND. IT ENDED THE YEAR THAT LORELEI CHOSE HEINRICH.
YOU SEE, THE PROBLEM WITH HEINRICH WAS A GIRL NAMED SOFIA. WHEN THEY WERE BOTH SIXTEEN, HEINRICH PROMISED TO LOVE SOFIA UNTIL HIS DYING BREATH, AND SOFIA, HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS OF OAK TREES, SWORE NEVER TO LEAVE HEINRICH'S SIDE.
THEY HAD TOLD NO ONE OF THEIR VOWS, AFRAID AS THEY WERE OF THEIR FAMILIES' REACTIONS. SOFIA WAS THE DAUGHTER OF FOREST WITCHES, AND HEINRICH'S FAMILY, LIKE ALL OF THE WOCHARA TOWNSFOLK, WERE WARY OF THE FOREST.

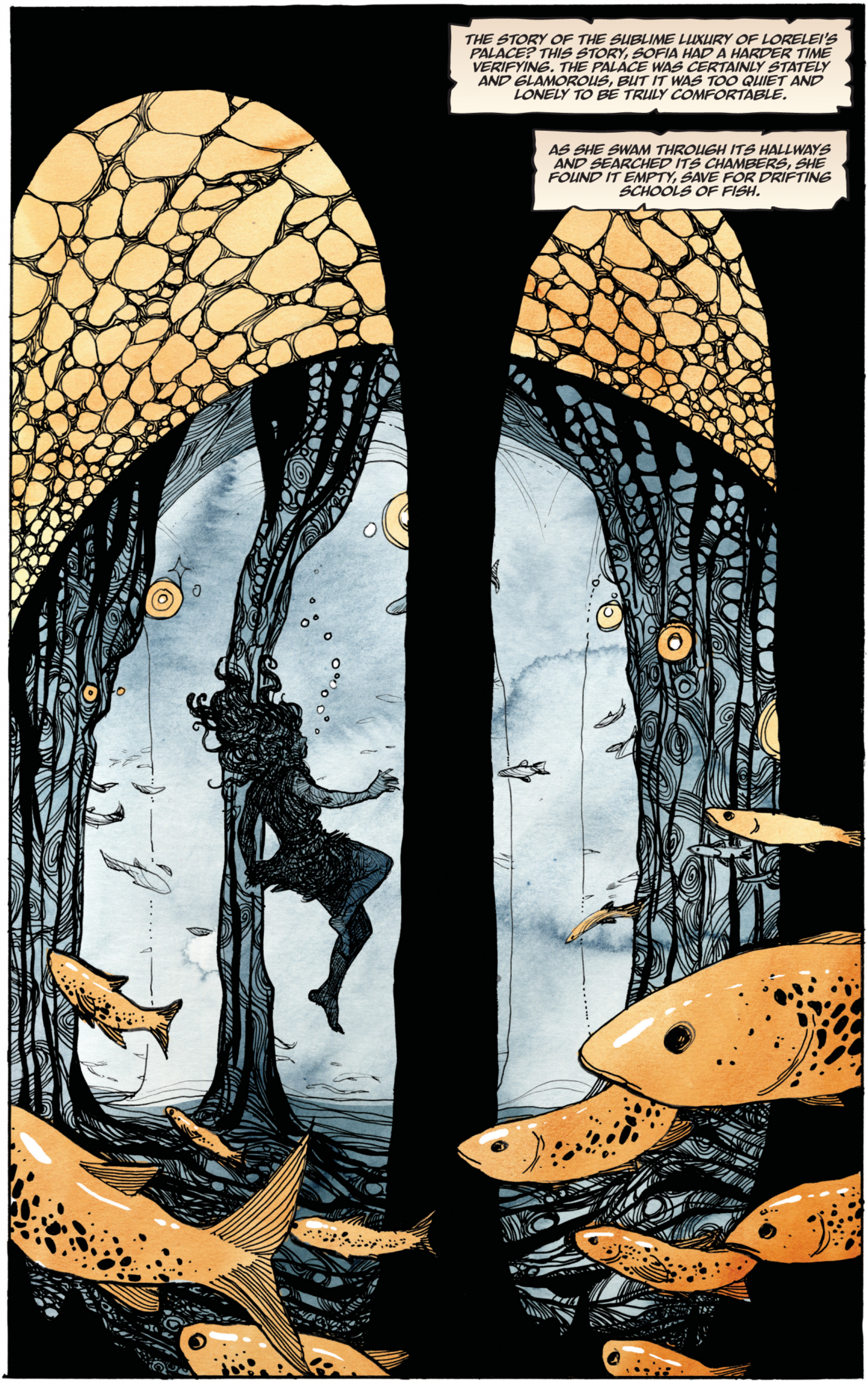

ON THE EVE OF THE MIDSUMMER SOLSTICE, HEINRICH AND SOFIA MET BY MOONLIGHT TO CONCOCT A PLAN. THEY WHISPERED TO EACH OTHER; THEY HELD EACH OTHER'S HANDS; THEY KISSED--THEN THEY BROKE AWAY FROM EACH OTHER TO FACE THE COMING DAY.

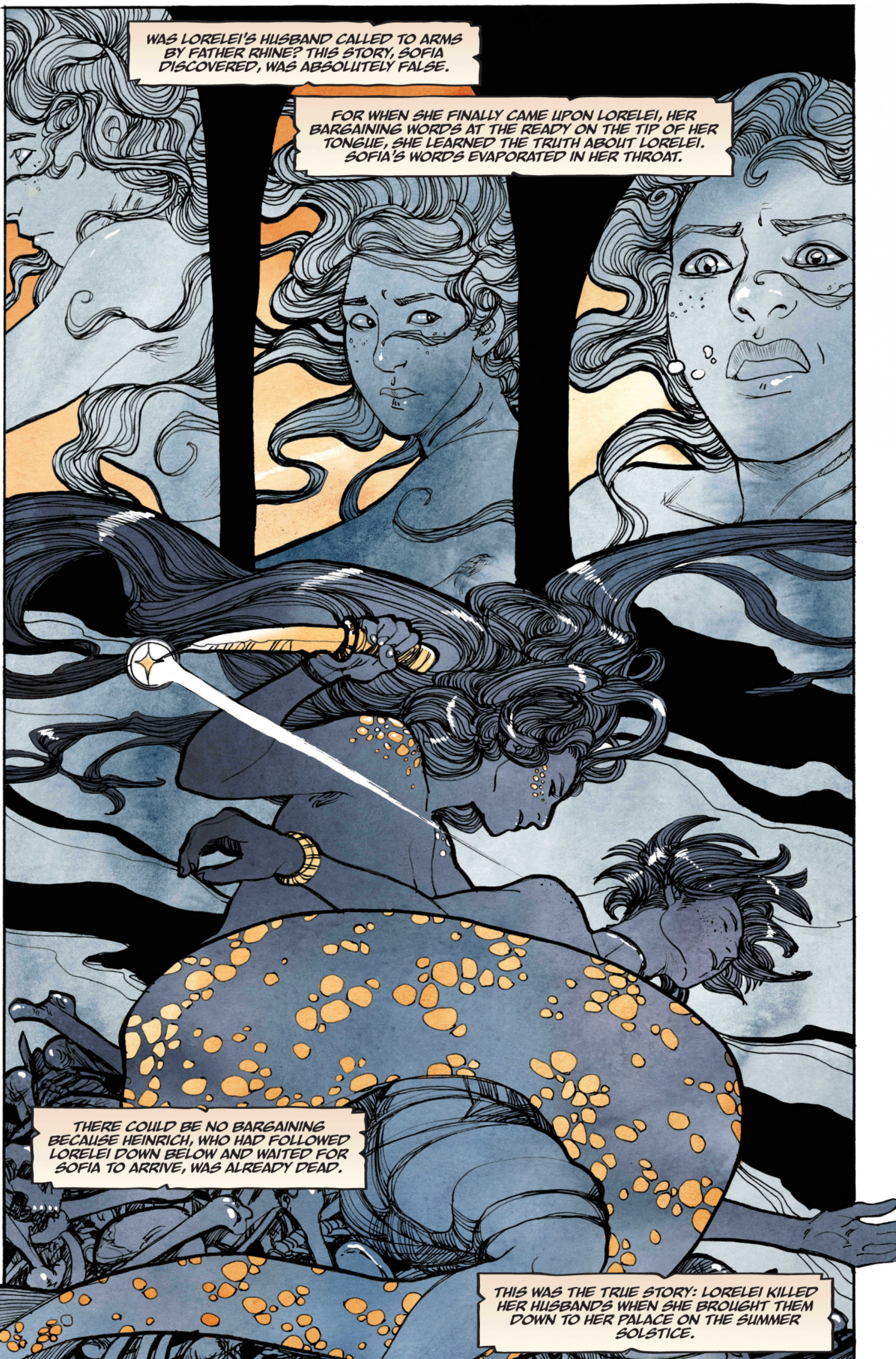

THEY BOTH FOLLOWED THE PLAN PERFECTLY: SOFIA TRAILED THE PAGEANT AS IT BORE HEINRICH TO THE RIVER. SHE WATCHED AS HE STEPPED INTO LORELEI'S ARMS.
SHE LINGERED AS THE TOWNSPEOPLE FLOCKED BACK TO WOCHARA'S TOWN SQUARE, WHERE A BONFIRE AND BARRELS OF ALE AND TABLES OF SWEETS WAITED FOR THEM.
SOFIA STEPPED DOWN TO THE WATER.

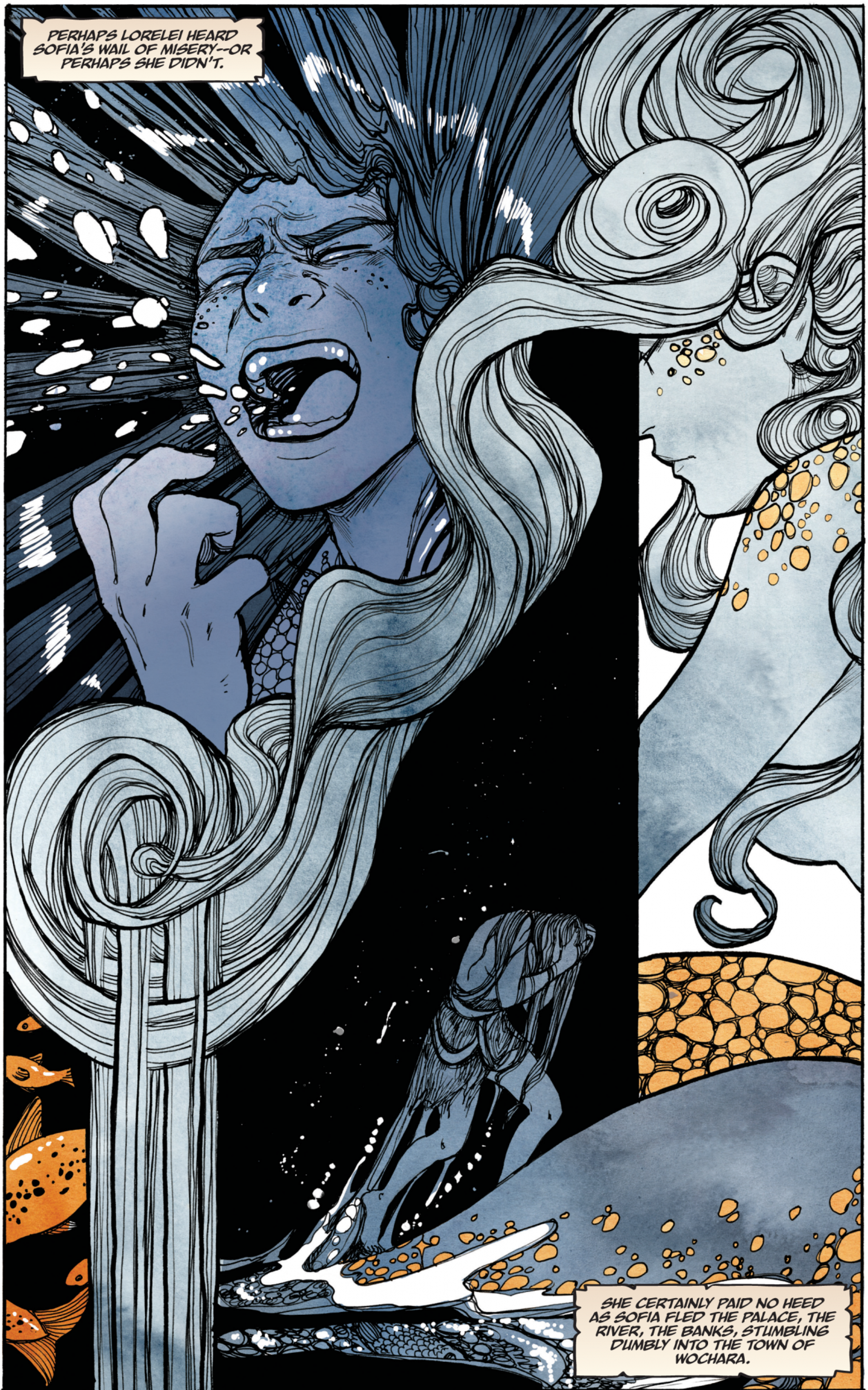

SOFIA WAS NOT A PARTICULARLY GOOD WITCH, DESPITE HER UPBRINGING. SHE COULD NOT TRICK FOXES OR READ THE FUTURE IN THE FACE OF THE MOON OR HEAR THE SLEEPY MURMURS OF TREES. BUT SHE DID KNOW HOW TO CONVINCE A FISH TO LET HER BORROW ITS LUNGS FOR AN HOUR, AND THIS WAS ALL THAT SHE NEEDED TO KNOW.
LITTLE HANDSOME FISH, I HAVE A DEAL FOR YOU. IF YOU LET ME BORROW YOUR AIR FOR AN HOUR OR TWO, I'LL PAINT YOUR SCALES IN PURE GOLD, SO THAT ALL THE OTHER FISH GASP AT THE SIGHT OF YOU.

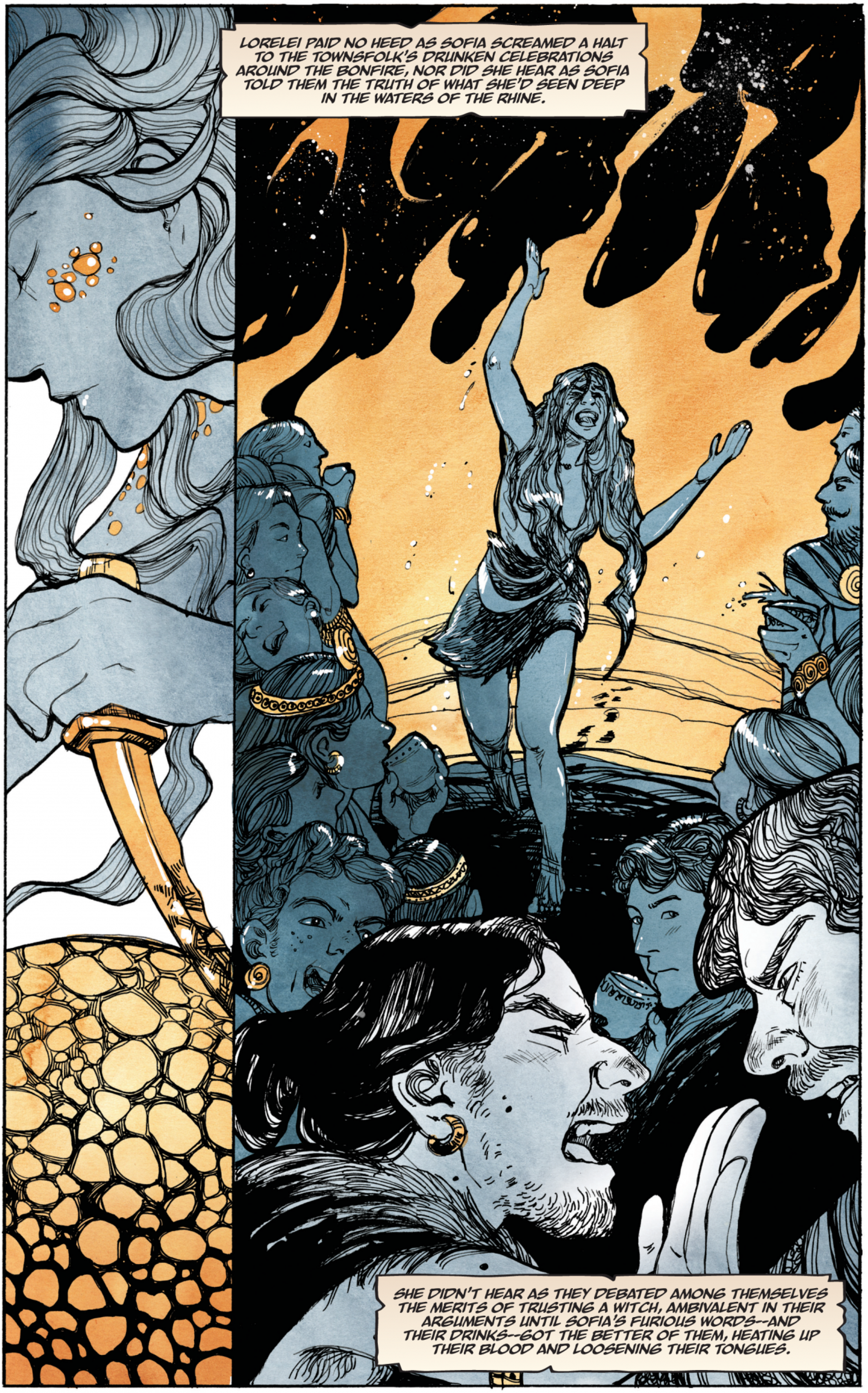

WITH THE FISH'S GILLS CURVING ON HER NECK, SOFIA DIVED INTO THE RHINE, AND SHE SWAM TO FIND HER LOVE. SHE SWAM TO FIND LORELEI, TO BARGAIN WITH HER FOR HEINRICH'S LIFE. SHE SWAM TO FIND OUT IF THE TOWNSFOLK'S STORIES WERE TRUE.

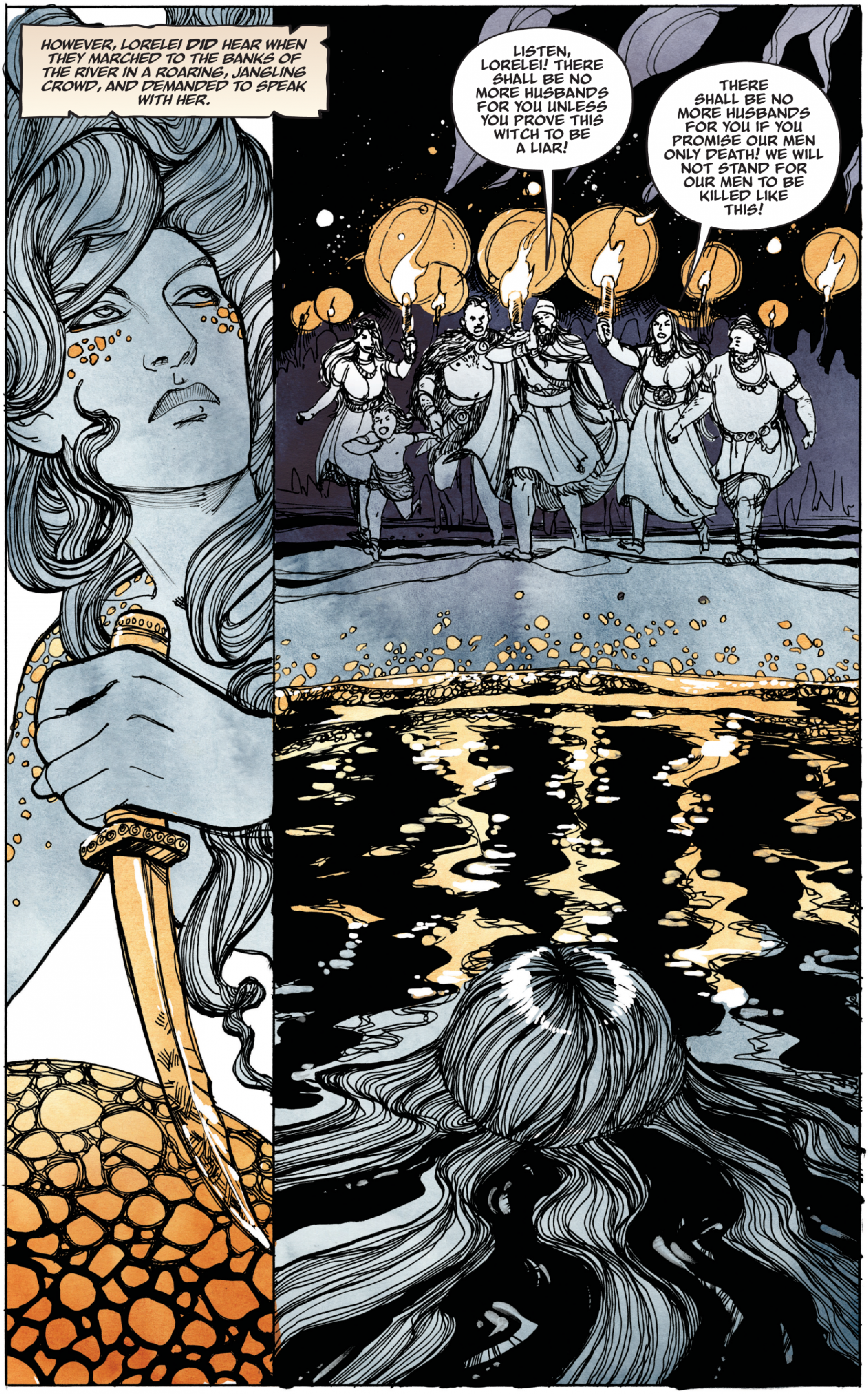

THE TALE OF LORELEI'S PALACE: YES, THAT STORY WAS TRUE. DEEP UNDER THE WATERS OF THE RHINE, DEEPER THAN ANY OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE DARED TO VENTURE, THE PALACE GLEAMED LIKE A CROWN MADE OF ICE AND GOLD.


THE STORY OF THE SUBLIME LUXURY OF LORELEI'S PALACE? THIS STORY, SOFIA HAD A HARDER TIME VERIFYING. THE PALACE WAS CERTAINLY STATELY AND GLAMOROUS, BUT IT WAS TOO QUIET AND LONELY TO BE TRULY COMFORTABLE.
AS SHE SWAM THROUGH ITS HALLWAYS AND SEARCHED ITS CHAMBERS, SHE FOUND IT EMPTY, SAVE FOR DRIFTING SCHOOLS OF FISH.

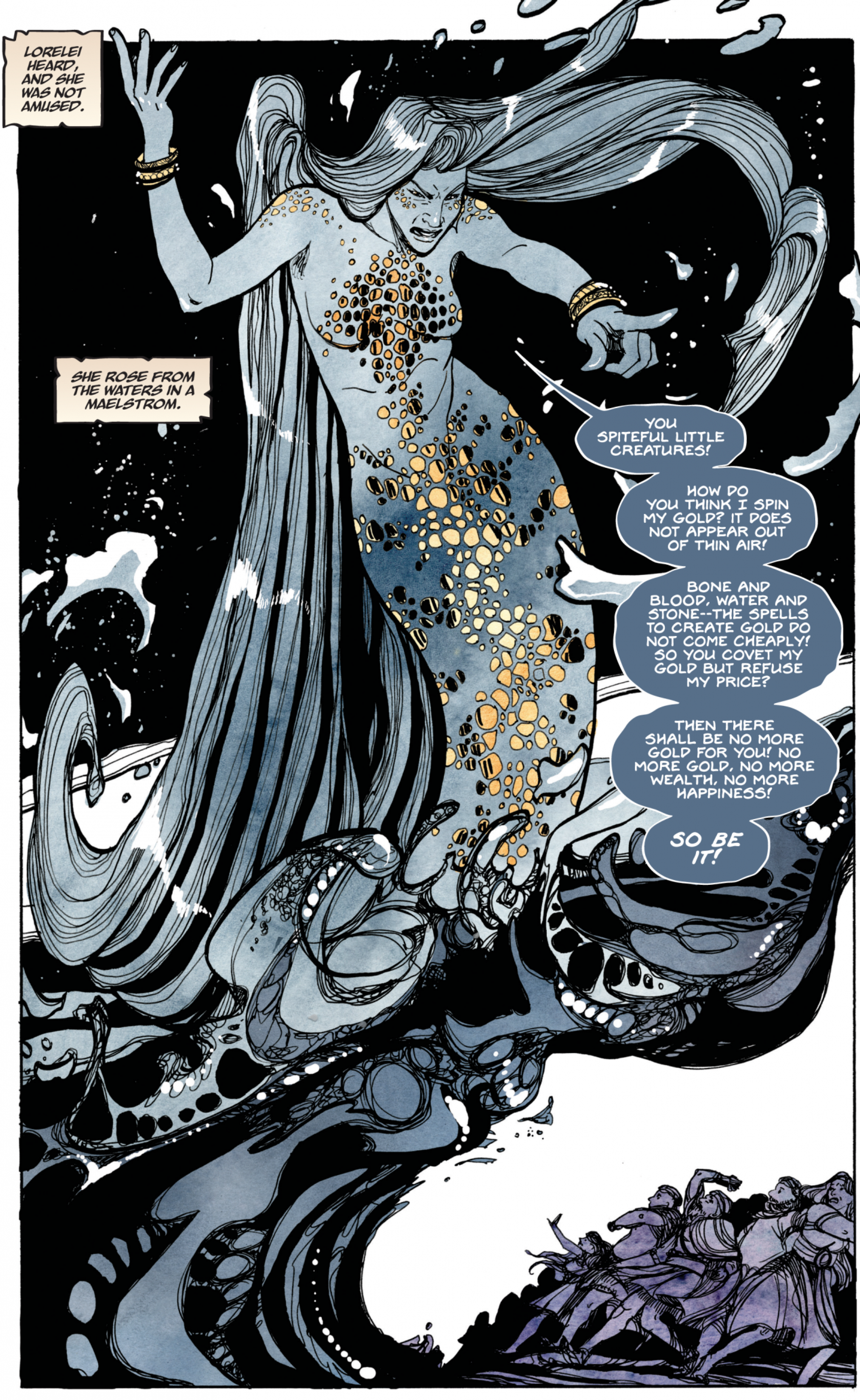

WAS LORELEI'S HUSBAND CALLED TO ARMS BY FATHER RHINE? THIS STORY, SOFIA DISCOVERED, WAS ABSOLUTELY FALSE.
FOR WHEN SHE FINALLY CAME UPON LORELEI, HER BARGAINING WORDS AT THE READY ON THE TIP OF HER TONGUE, SHE LEARNED THE TRUTH ABOUT LORELEI. SOFIA'S WORDS EVAPORATED IN HER THROAT.
THERE COULD BE NO BARGAINING BECAUSE HEINRICH, WHO HAD FOLLOWED LORELEI DOWN BELOW AND WAITED FOR SOFIA TO ARRIVE, WAS ALREADY DEAD.
THIS WAS THE TRUE STORY: LORELEI KILLED HER HUSBANDS WHEN SHE BROUGHT THEM DOWN TO HER PALACE ON THE SUMMER SOLSTICE.

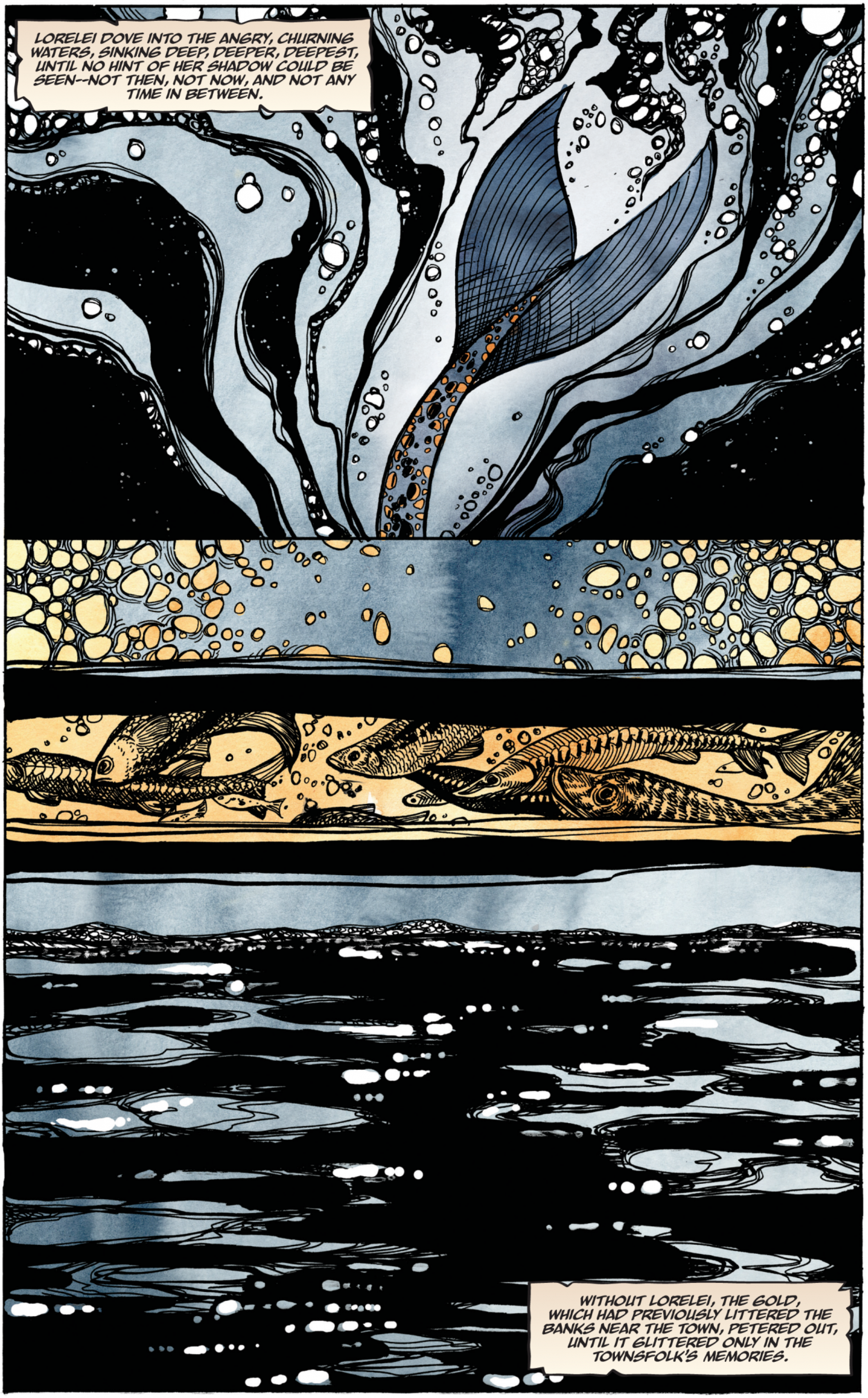

PERHAPS LORELEI HEARD SOFIA'S WAIL OF MISERY--OR PERHAPS SHE DIDN'T.
SHE CERTAINLY PAID NO HEED AS SOFIA FLED THE PALACE, THE RIVER, THE BANKS, STUMBLING DUMBLY INTO THE TOWN OF WOCHARA.

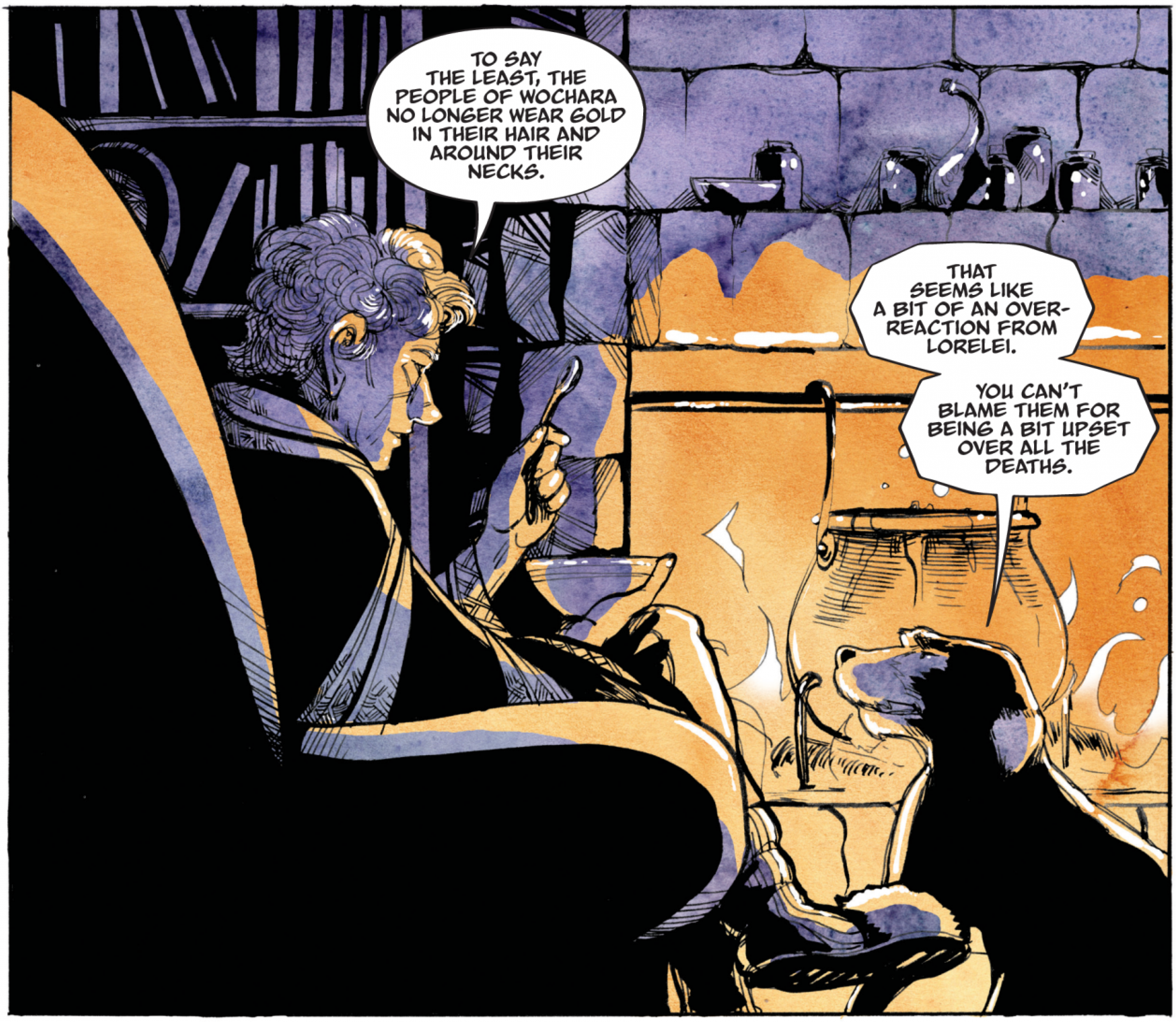

LORELEI PAID NO HEED AS SOFIA SCREAMED A HALT TO THE TOWNSFOLK'S DRUNKEN CELEBRATIONS AROUND THE BONFIRE, NOR DID SHE HEAR AS SOFIA TOLD THEM THE TRUTH OF WHAT SHE'D SEEN DEEP IN THE WATERS OF THE RHINE.
SHE DIDN'T HEAR AS THEY DEBATED AMONG THEMSELVES THE MERITS OF TRUSTING A WITCH, AMBIVALENT IN THEIR ARGUMENTS UNTIL SOFIA'S FURIOUS WORDS--AND THEIR DRINKS--GOT THE BETTER OF THEM, HEATING UP THEIR BLOOD AND LOOSENING THEIR TONGUES.

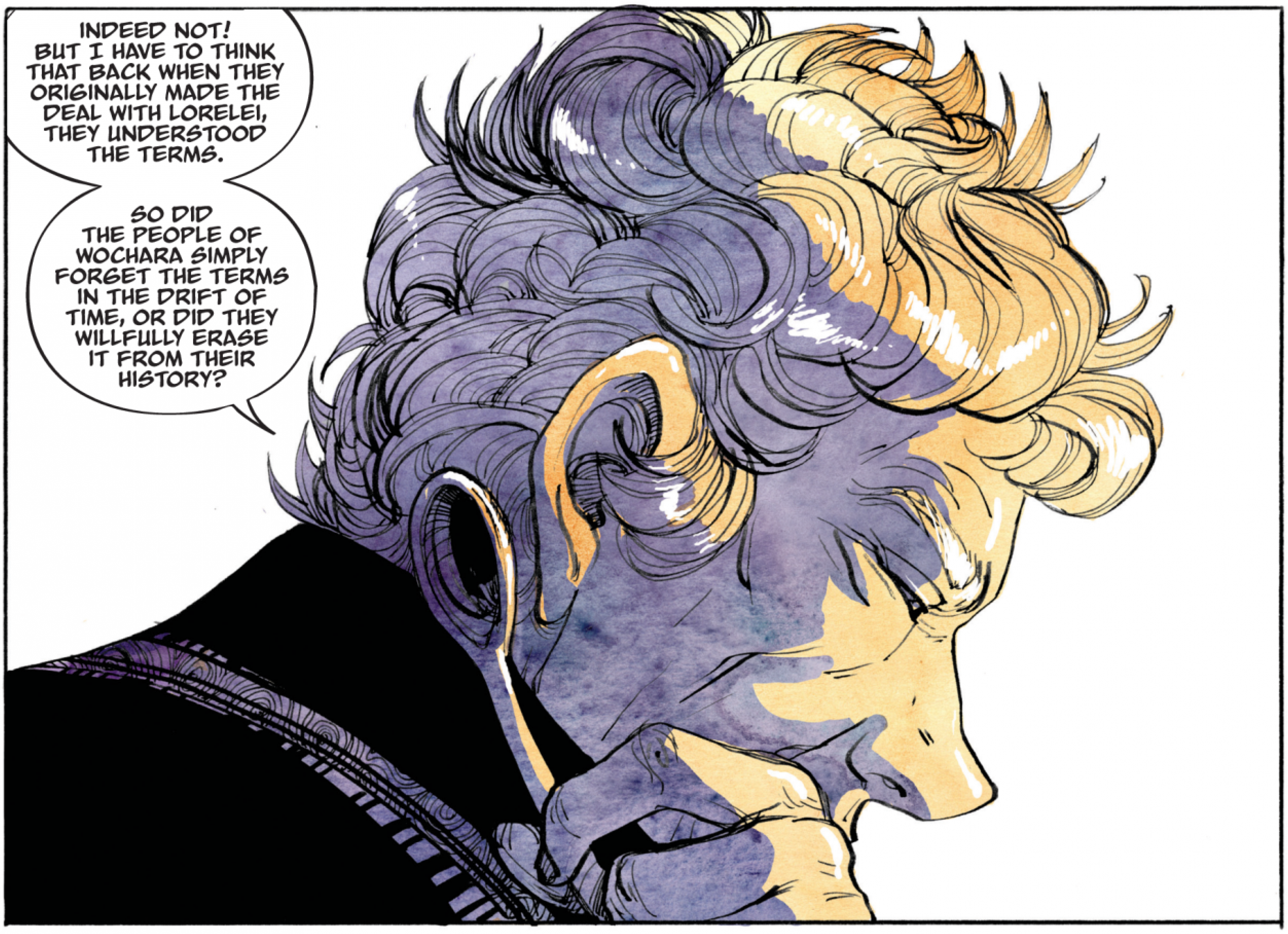


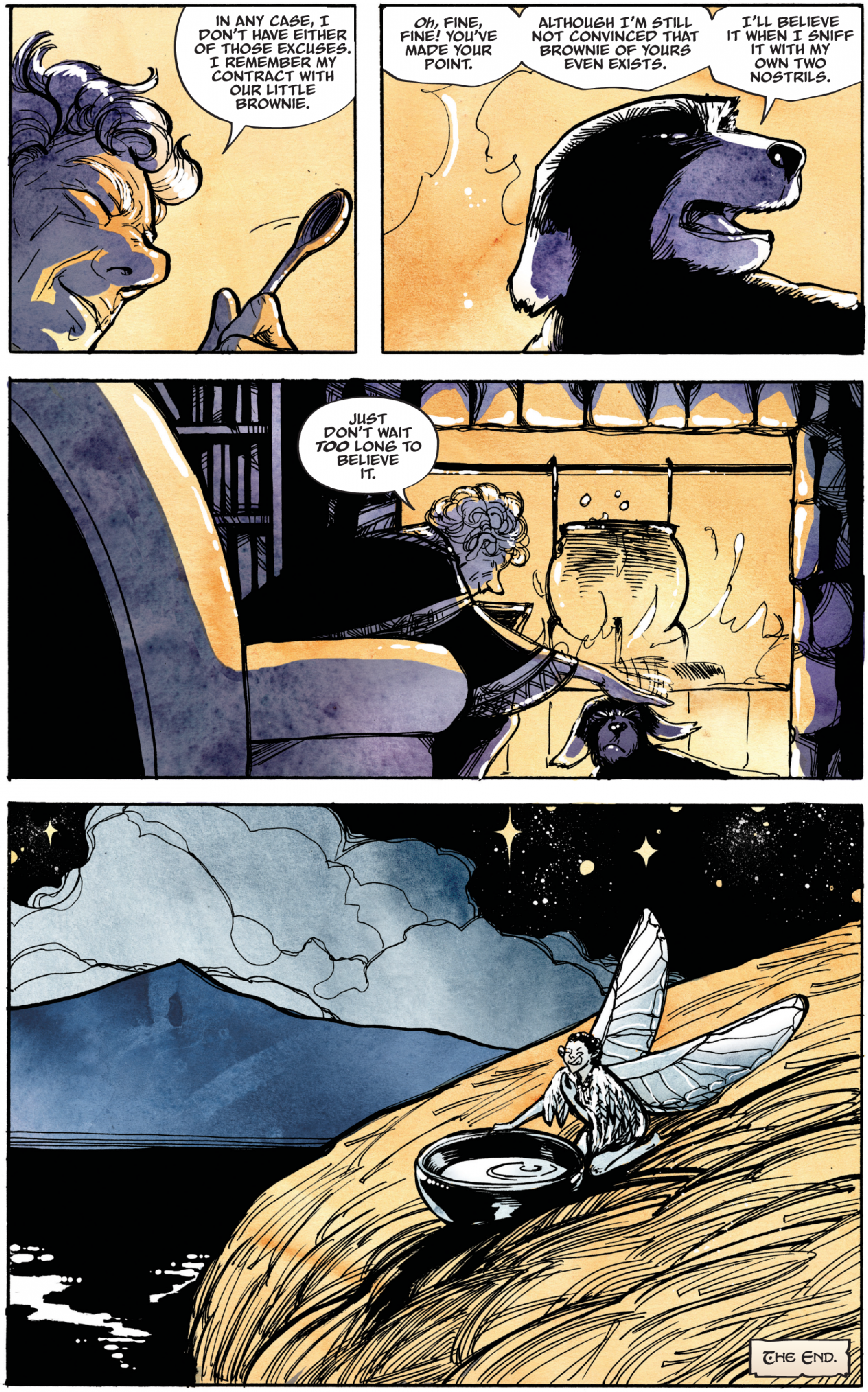
HOWEVER, LORELEI *DID* HEAR WHEN THEY MARCHED TO THE BANKS OF THE RIVER IN A ROARING, JANGLING CROWD, AND DEMANDED TO SPEAK WITH HER.
LISTEN, LORELEI! THERE SHALL BE NO MORE HUSBANDS FOR YOU UNLESS YOU PROVE THIS WITCH TO BE A LIAR!
THERE SHALL BE NO MORE HUSBANDS FOR YOU IF YOU PROMISE OUR MEN ONLY DEATH! WE WILL NOT STAND FOR OUR MEN TO BE KILLED LIKE THIS!


LORELEI HEARD, AND SHE WAS NOT AMUSED.
SHE ROSE FROM THE WATERS IN A MAELSTROM.
YOU SPITEFUL LITTLE CREATURES!
HOW DO YOU THINK I SPIN MY GOLD? IT DOES NOT APPEAR OUT OF THIN AIR!
BONE AND BLOOD, WATER AND STONE--THE SPELLS TO CREATE GOLD DO NOT COME CHEAPLY! SO YOU COVET MY GOLD BUT REFUSE MY PRICE?
THEN THERE SHALL BE NO MORE GOLD FOR YOU! NO MORE GOLD, NO MORE WEALTH, NO MORE HAPPINESS!
SO BE IT!


LORELEI DOVE INTO THE ANGRY, CHURNING WATERS, SINKING DEEP, DEEPER, DEEPEST, UNTIL NO HINT OF HER SHADOW COULD BE SEEN--NOT THEN, NOT NOW, AND NOT ANY TIME IN BETWEEN.
WITHOUT LORELEI, THE GOLD, WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY LITTERED THE BANKS NEAR THE TOWN, PETERED OUT, UNTIL IT GLITTERED ONLY IN THE TOWNSFOLK'S MEMORIES.


TO SAY THE LEAST, THE PEOPLE OF WOCHARA NO LONGER WEAR GOLD IN THEIR HAIR AND AROUND THEIR NECKS.
THAT SEEMS LIKE A BIT OF AN OVER-REACTION FROM LORELEI.
YOU CAN'T BLAME THEM FOR BEING A BIT UPSET OVER ALL THE DEATHS.


INDEED NOT! BUT I HAVE TO THINK THAT BACK WHEN THEY ORIGINALLY MADE THE DEAL WITH LORELEI, THEY UNDERSTOOD THE TERMS.
SO DID THE PEOPLE OF WOCHARA SIMPLY FORGET THE TERMS IN THE DRIFT OF TIME, OR DID THEY WILLFULLY ERASE IT FROM THEIR HISTORY?


IN ANY CASE, I DON'T HAVE EITHER OF THOSE EXCUSES. I REMEMBER MY CONTRACT WITH OUR LITTLE BROWNIE.
Oh, FINE, FINE! YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.
ALTHOUGH I'M STILL NOT CONVINCED THAT BROWNIE OF YOURS EVEN EXISTS.
I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SNIFF IT WITH MY OWN TWO NOSTRILS.
JUST DON'T WAIT *TOO* LONG TO BELIEVE IT.
THE END.

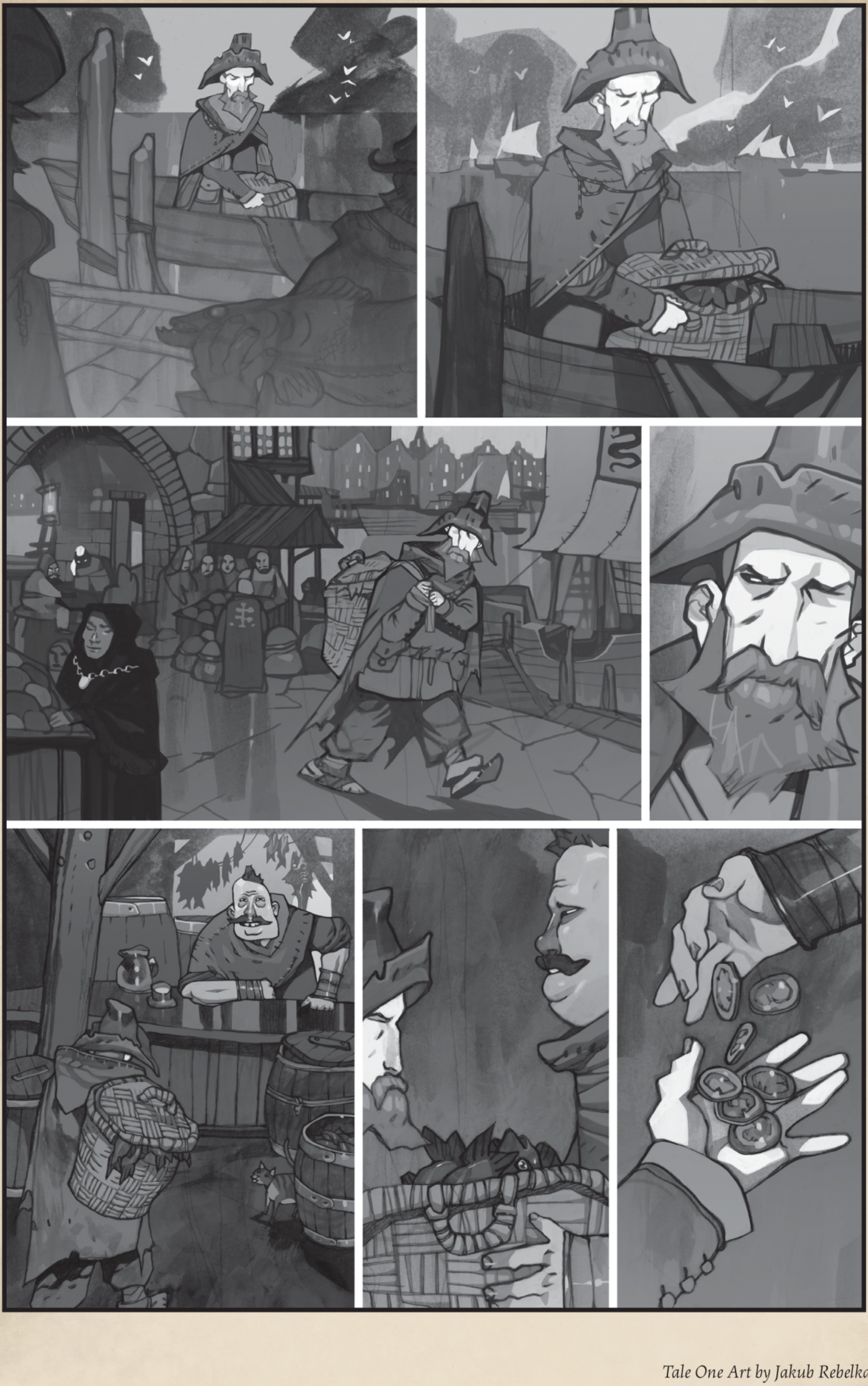
THE MAKING OF

Jim Henson's™ THE STORYTELLER™ Sirens

A BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE STORYTELLERS AND THEIR TALES.

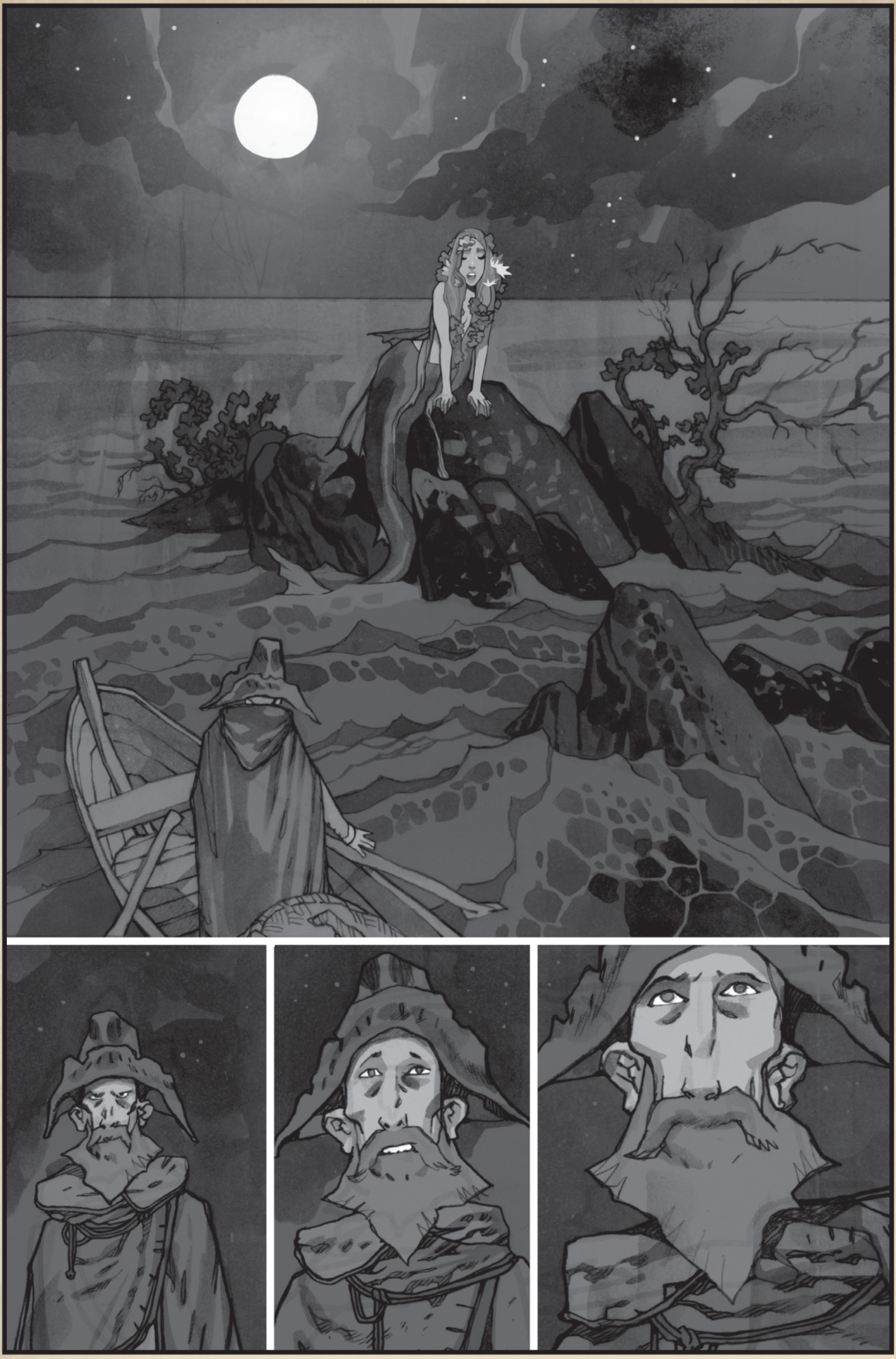
With Art and Commentary by

Jakub Rebelka
Sarah Webb
Chan Chau
Aud Koch



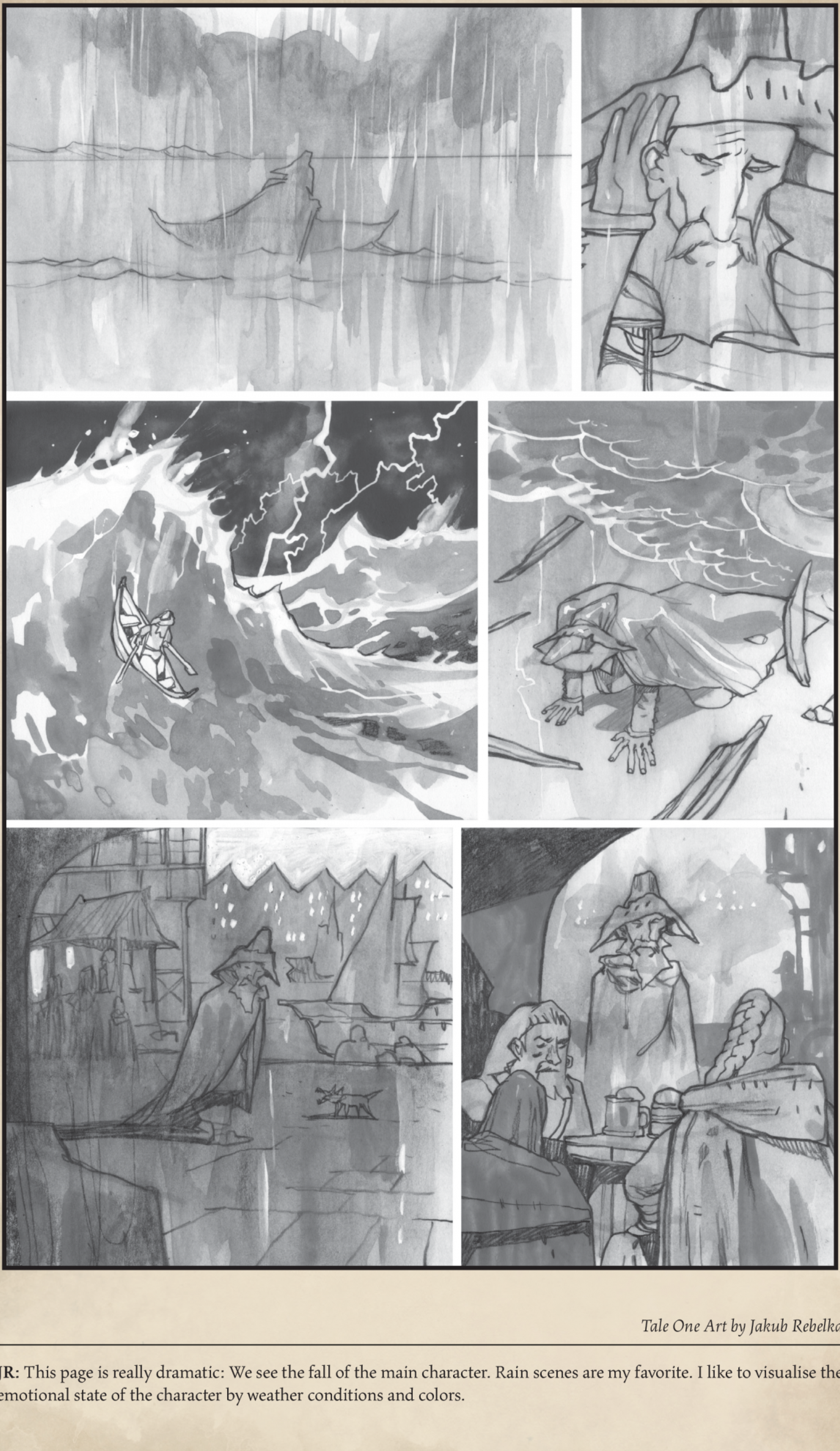
Tale One Art by Jakub Rebelka

Jakub Rebelka Commentary: Working on this book was a great experience for me. Jim Henson's movies and *The Storyteller* TV series were a big part of my childhood. Our story is set in a very old city in northern Poland—Gdańsk, the city I live in. I had a lot of fun imagining the locations and people living and working in an environment that today is a tourist attraction. I knew from the beginning that color would be a big part of this book, so my line art is rough and contains a lot of mess that is really helpful while coloring.



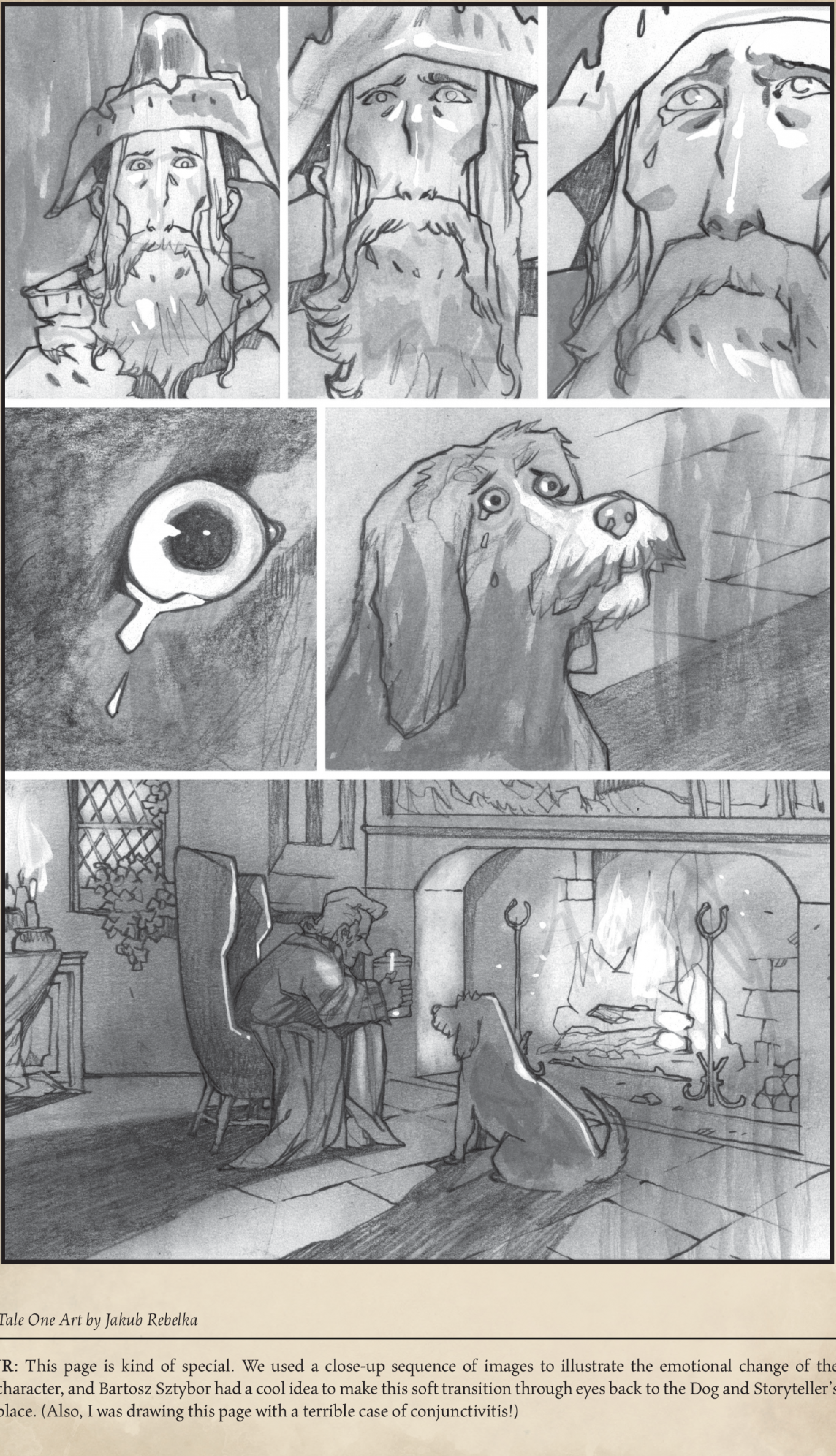
Tale One Art by Jakub Rebelka

JR: I used soft pencils and black crayons for the outlines and sumi black ink for the grey wash, which allowed me to add more texture in colors. On this page, my main focus was to show the magical atmosphere of the Baltic Sea and the mystical creature, the siren. While working on those images, I was planning the colors, so I did not want to go too dark despite the fact that the scene takes place at night. I thought color will do a better job of adding a magical atmosphere. The second row of the page shows the emotional change in the main character. Adding a zoom effect in the art makes it more animated.



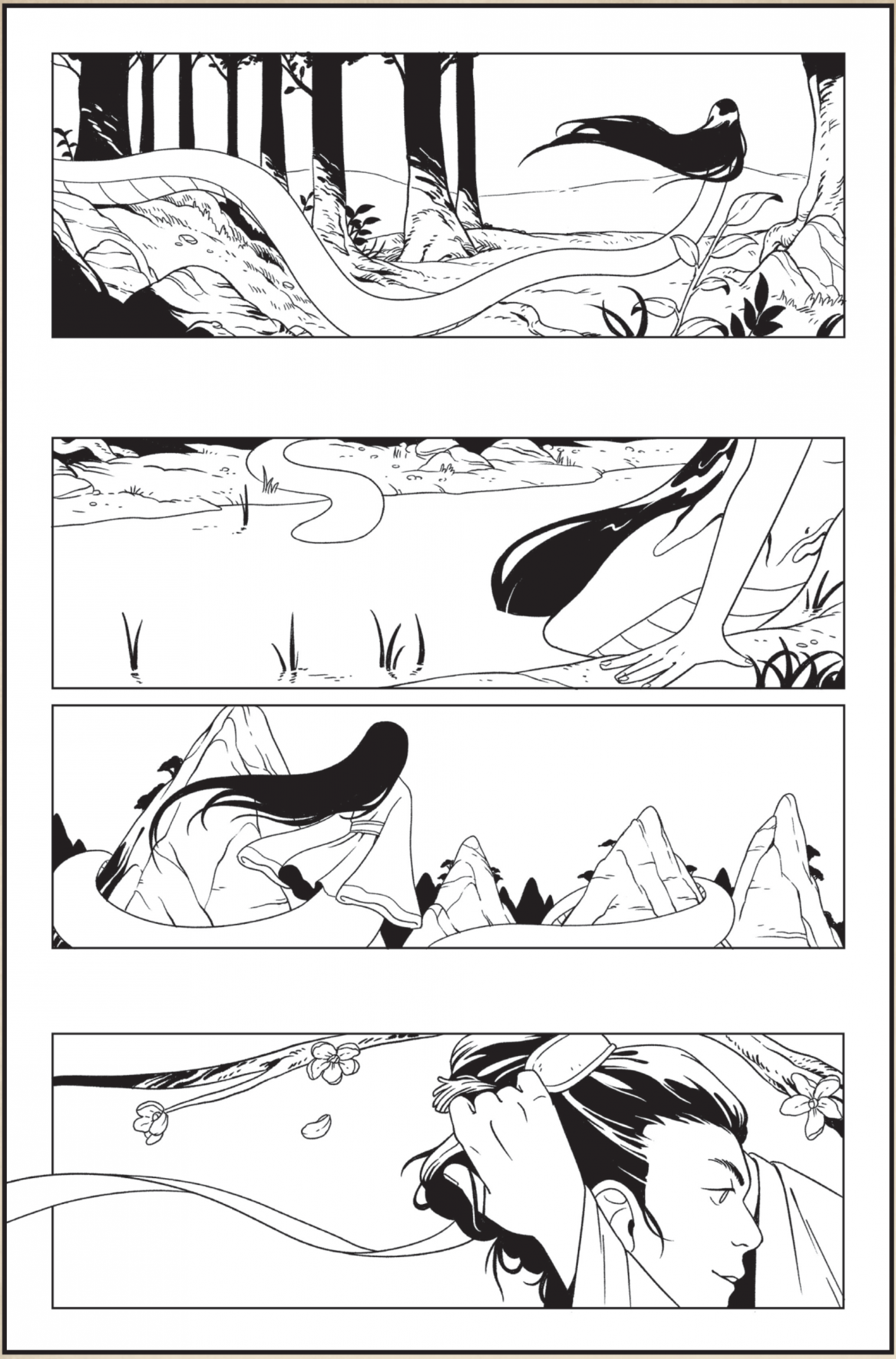
Tale One Art by Jakub Rebelka

JR: This page is really dramatic: We see the fall of the main character. Rain scenes are my favorite. I like to visualise the emotional state of the character by weather conditions and colors.



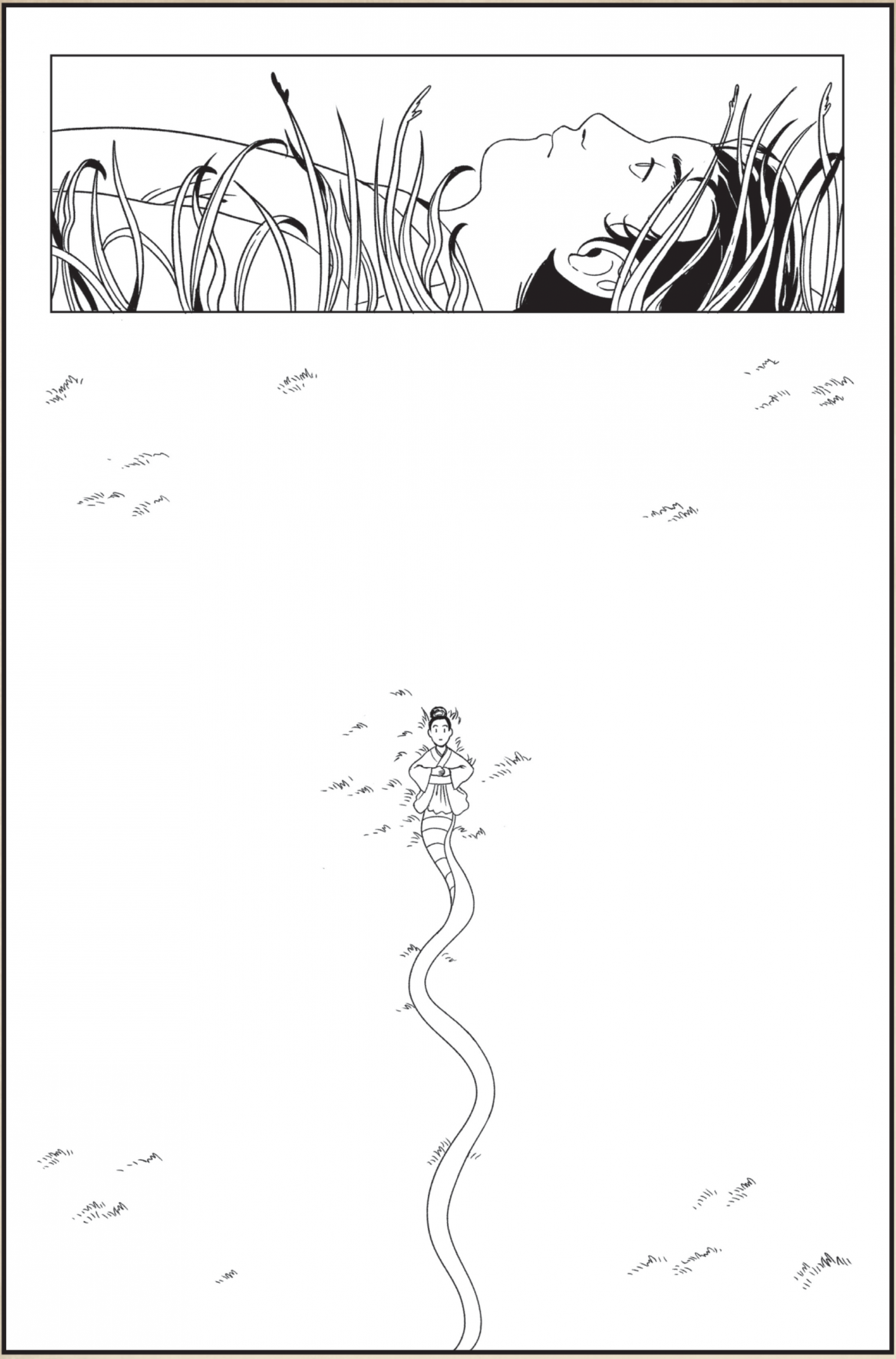
Tale One Art by Jakub Rebelka

JR: This page is kind of special. We used a close-up sequence of images to illustrate the emotional change of the character, and Bartosz Sztybor had a cool idea to make this soft transition through eyes back to the Dog and Storyteller's place. (Also, I was drawing this page with a terrible case of conjunctivitis!)



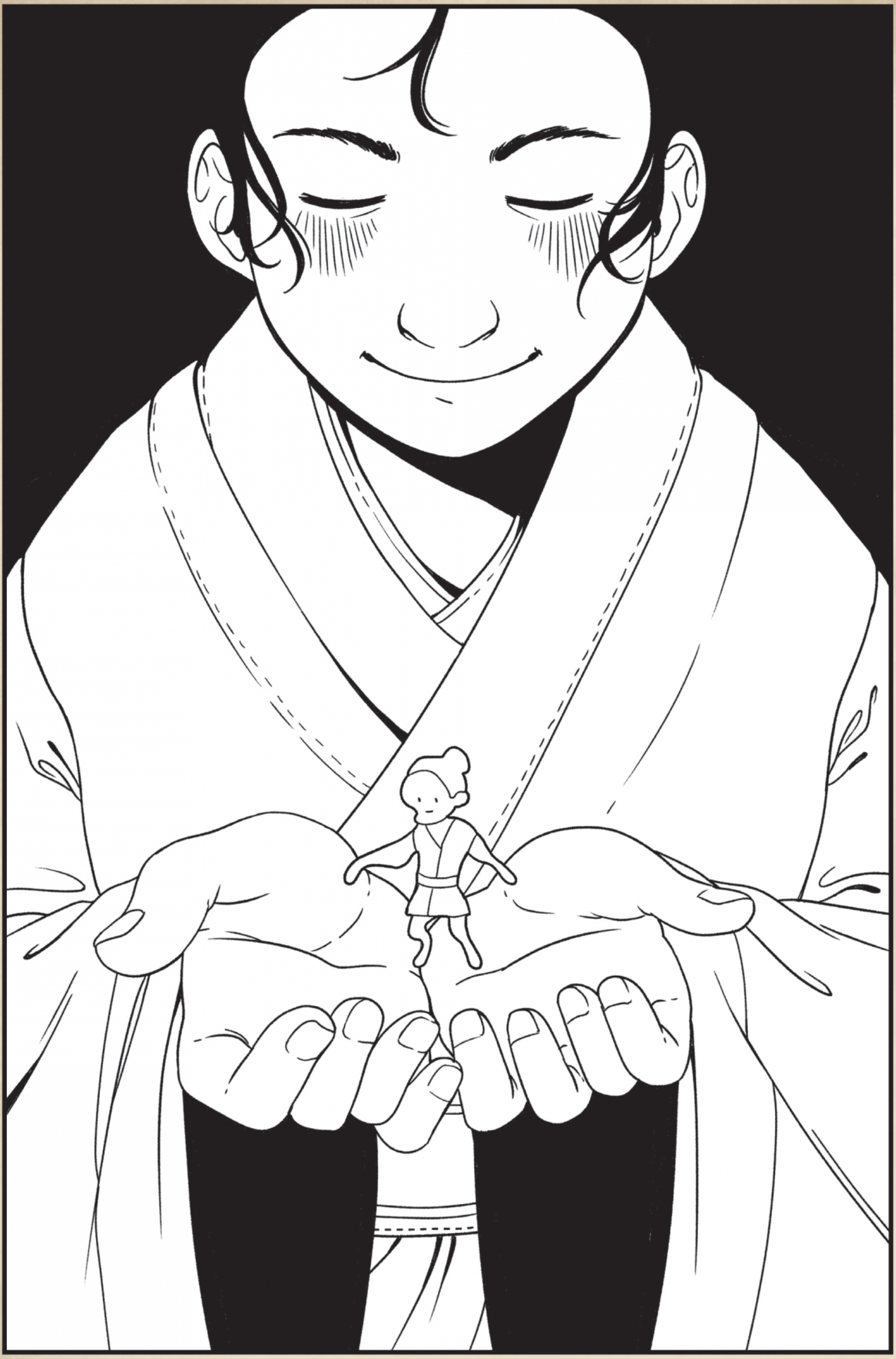
Tale Two Art by Chan Chau

Chan Chau Commentary: This is one of the first pages I inked in order to figure out the tone for the entire comic. Nuwa had different forms she could take, and although it only shows up once throughout this retelling, my favorite was the woman's head on a serpent's body. It is one of the most documented forms I could find while researching.



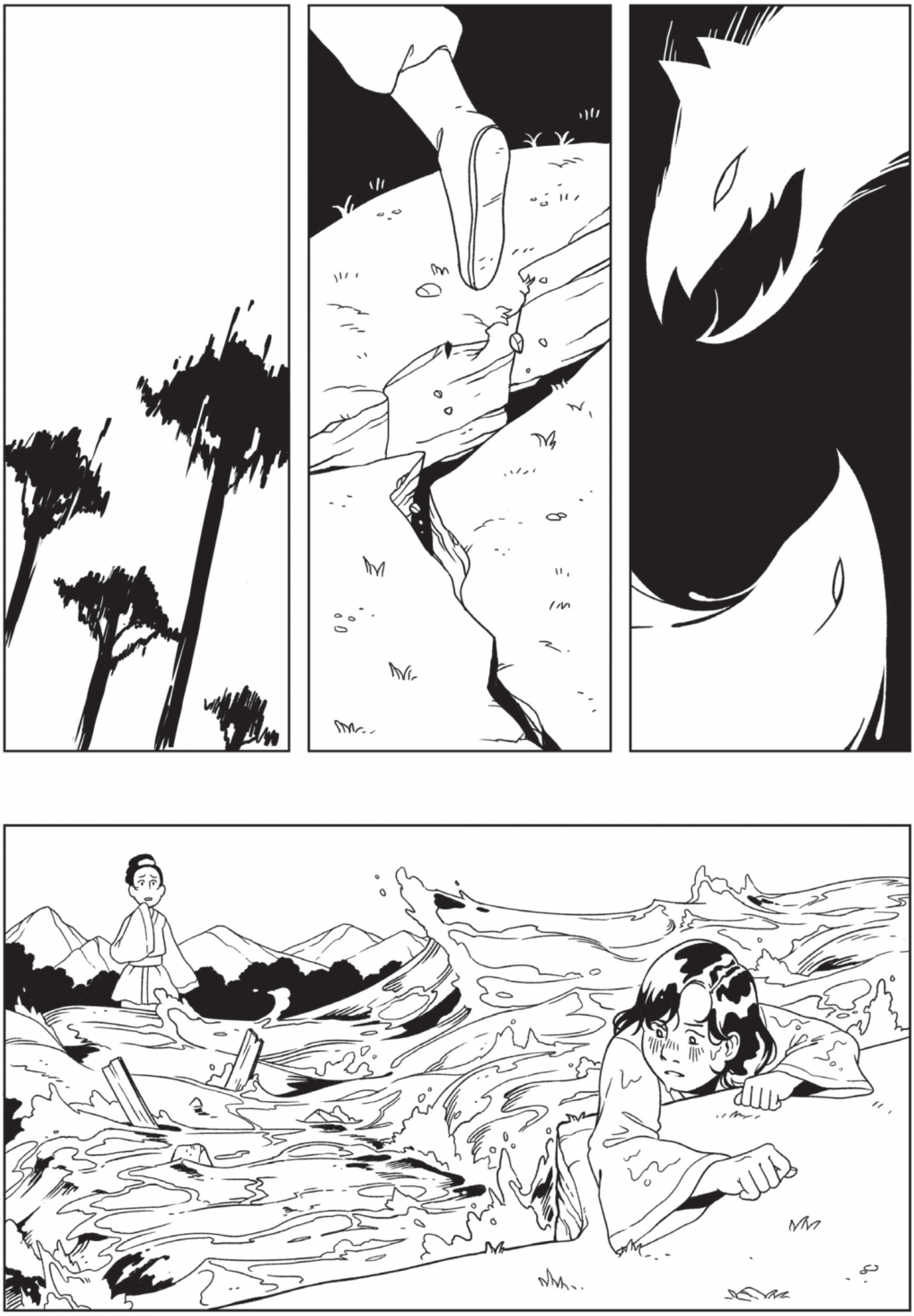
Tale Two Art by Chan Chau

CC: The original myth mentioned that her loneliness was the spark to create animals and humans to populate the earth. I loved utilizing negative space to show the idea of quiet, serene fields while capturing the sense that no one was there but her.



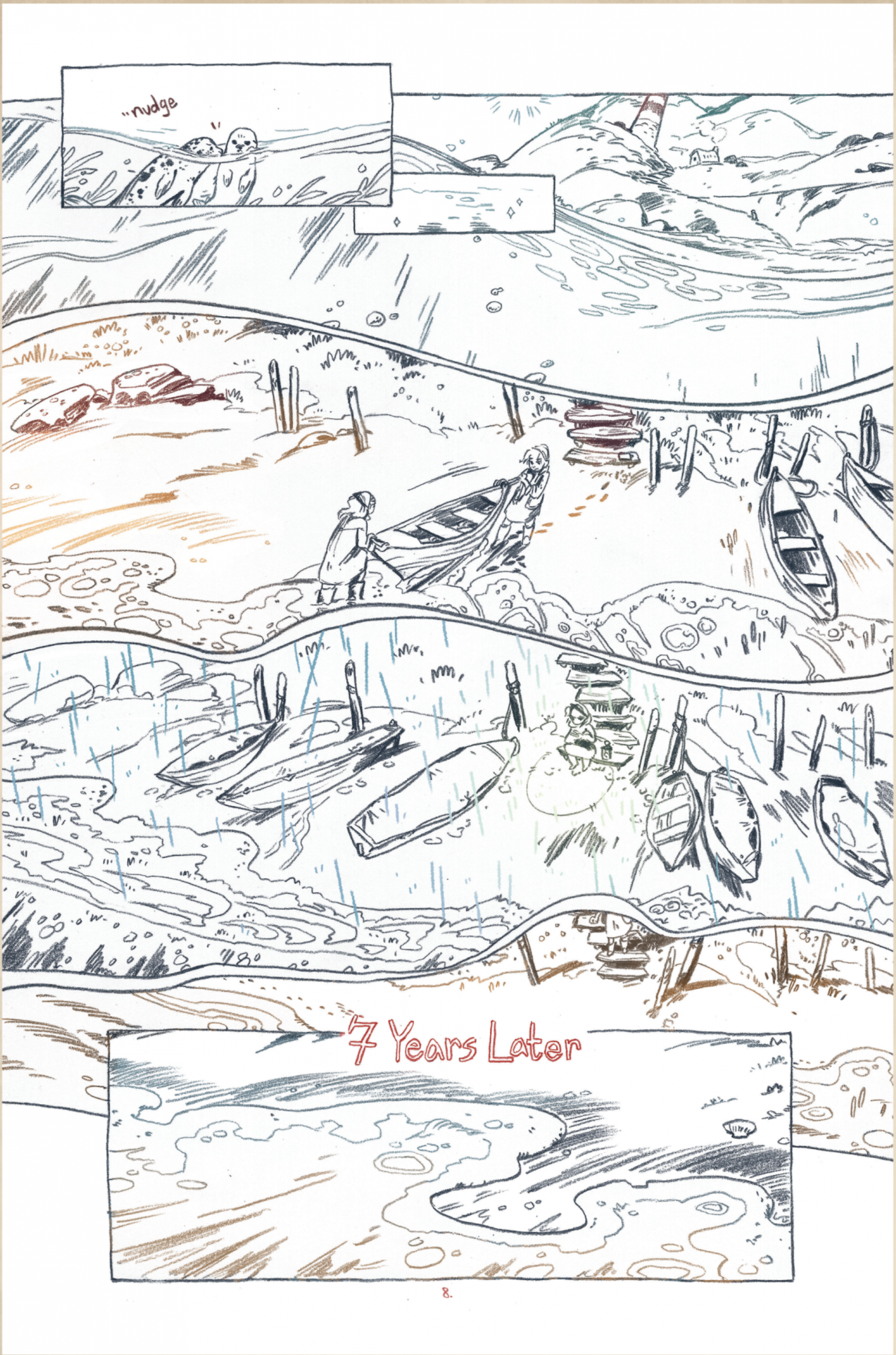
Tale Two Art by Chan Chau

CC: This full-page drawing was one of my favorites. It was meant to be a way to capture scale, but to also visually tell the audience how fragile and precious humans were compared to the goddess herself. Despite her first creation not being a "perfect" specimen of humankind, she was incredibly proud and caring of their well-being, which is a personal narrative touch I added.



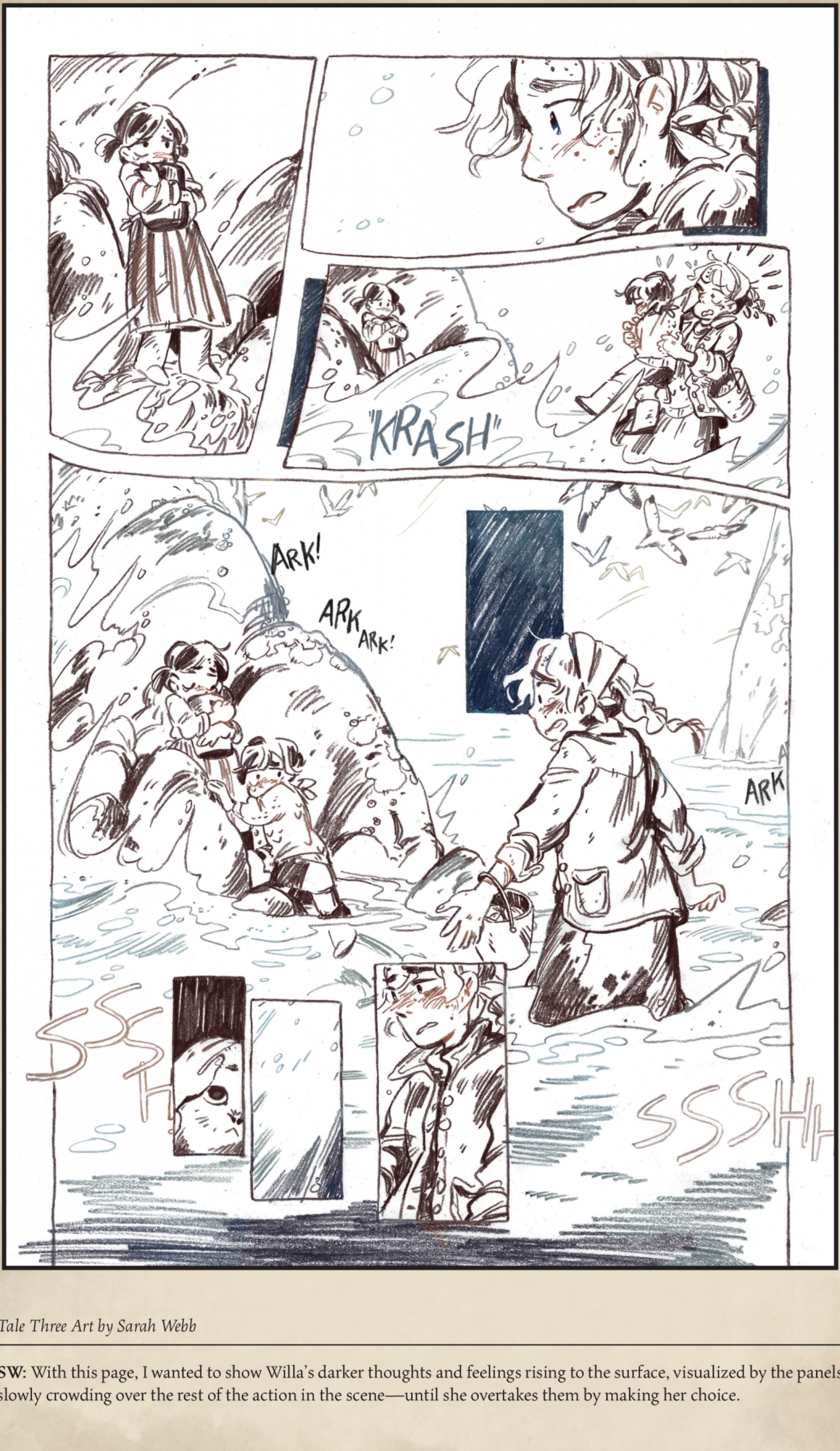
Tale Two Art by Chan Chau

CC: The myth itself mentions the ways in which the world was sent into chaos after the other gods foolishly destroyed the pillars of heaven. I wanted to show the tonal shift and the severity of the situation by using stark symbols and silhouettes.



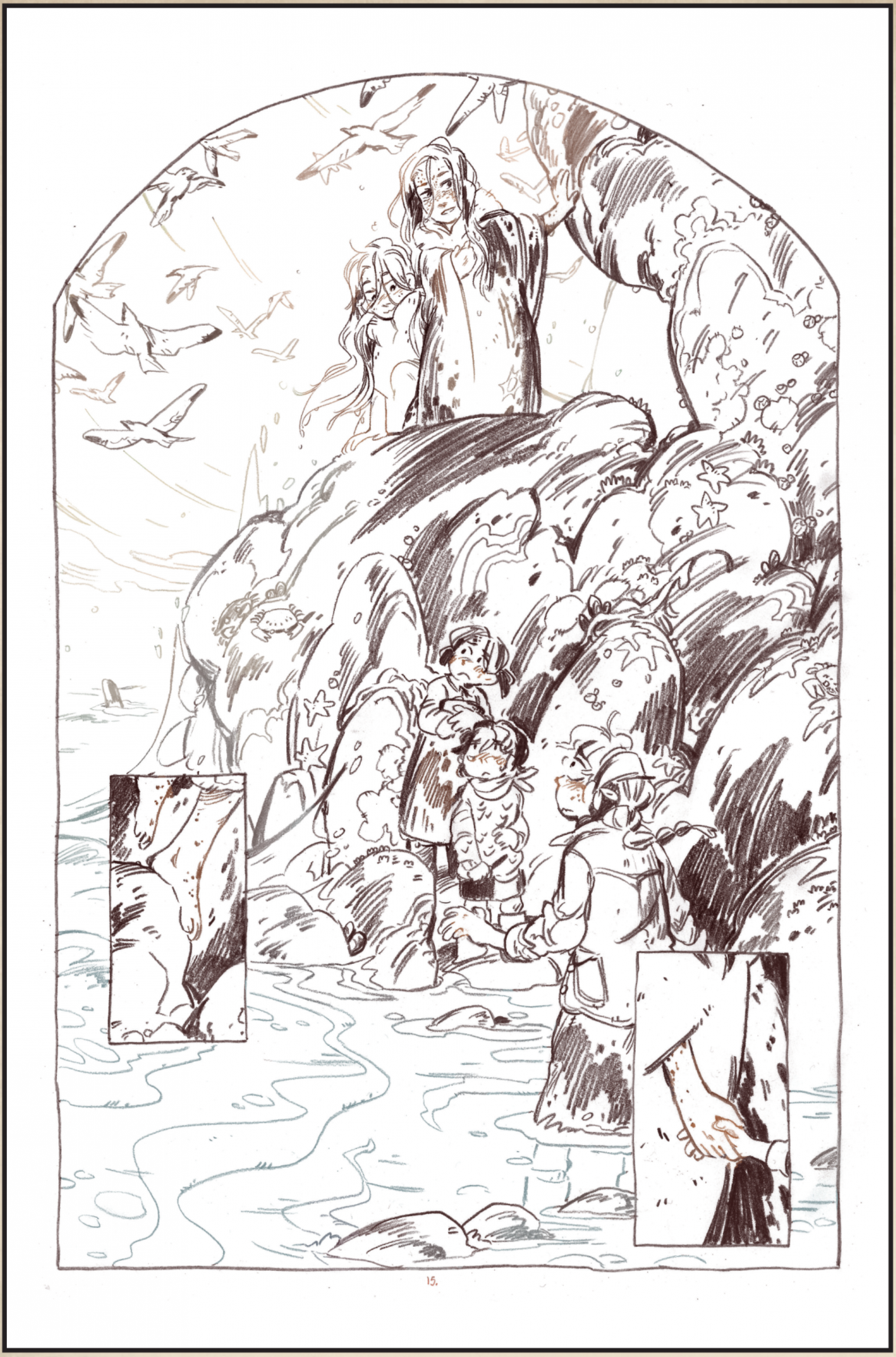
Tale Three Art by Sarah Webb

Sarah Webb Commentary: At this point in the original version of this story, we skipped forward in time to follow our main character's children. I wanted to bridge that time jump a little differently and let the reader follow a single main character a little more closely, so in my adaption we initially see Willa Westness meet the selkies as a child, and then eventually meet them again when she's older.


"KRASH"
ARK!
ARK ARK!
ARK
SSSH
SSSHH

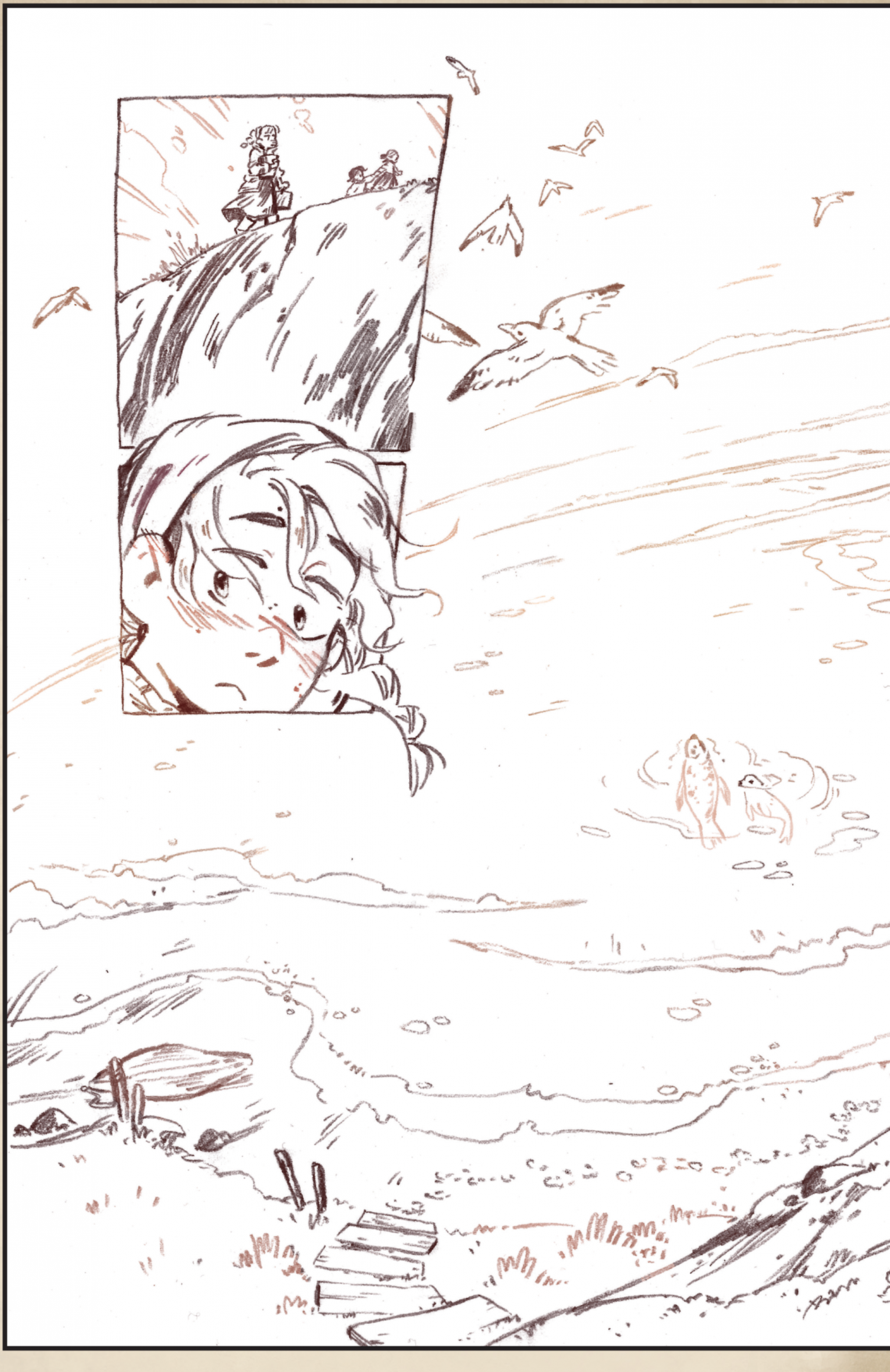
Tale Three Art by Sarah Webb

SW: With this page, I wanted to show Willa's darker thoughts and feelings rising to the surface, visualized by the panels slowly crowding over the rest of the action in the scene—until she overtakes them by making her choice.



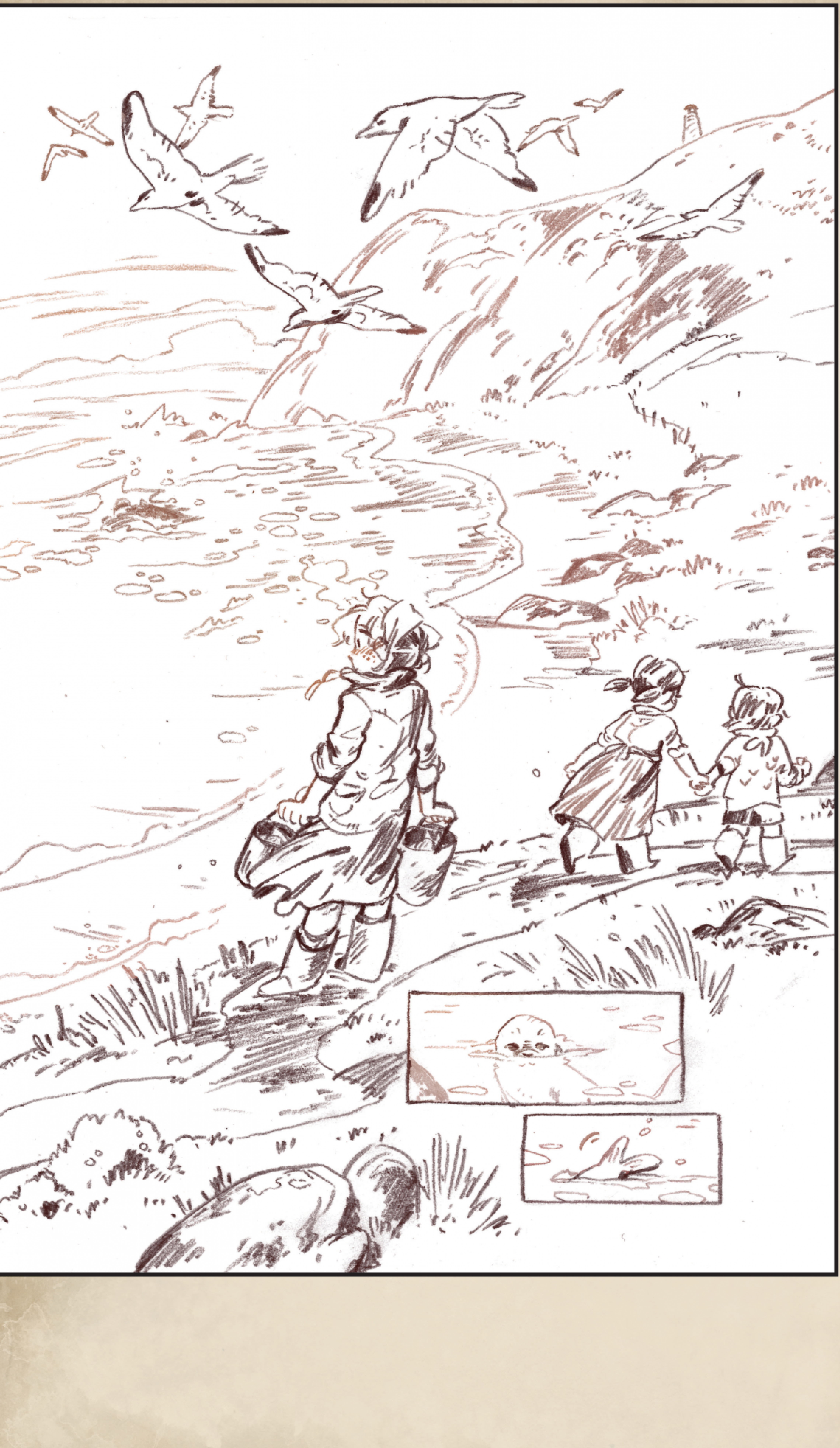
Tale Three Art by Sarah Webb

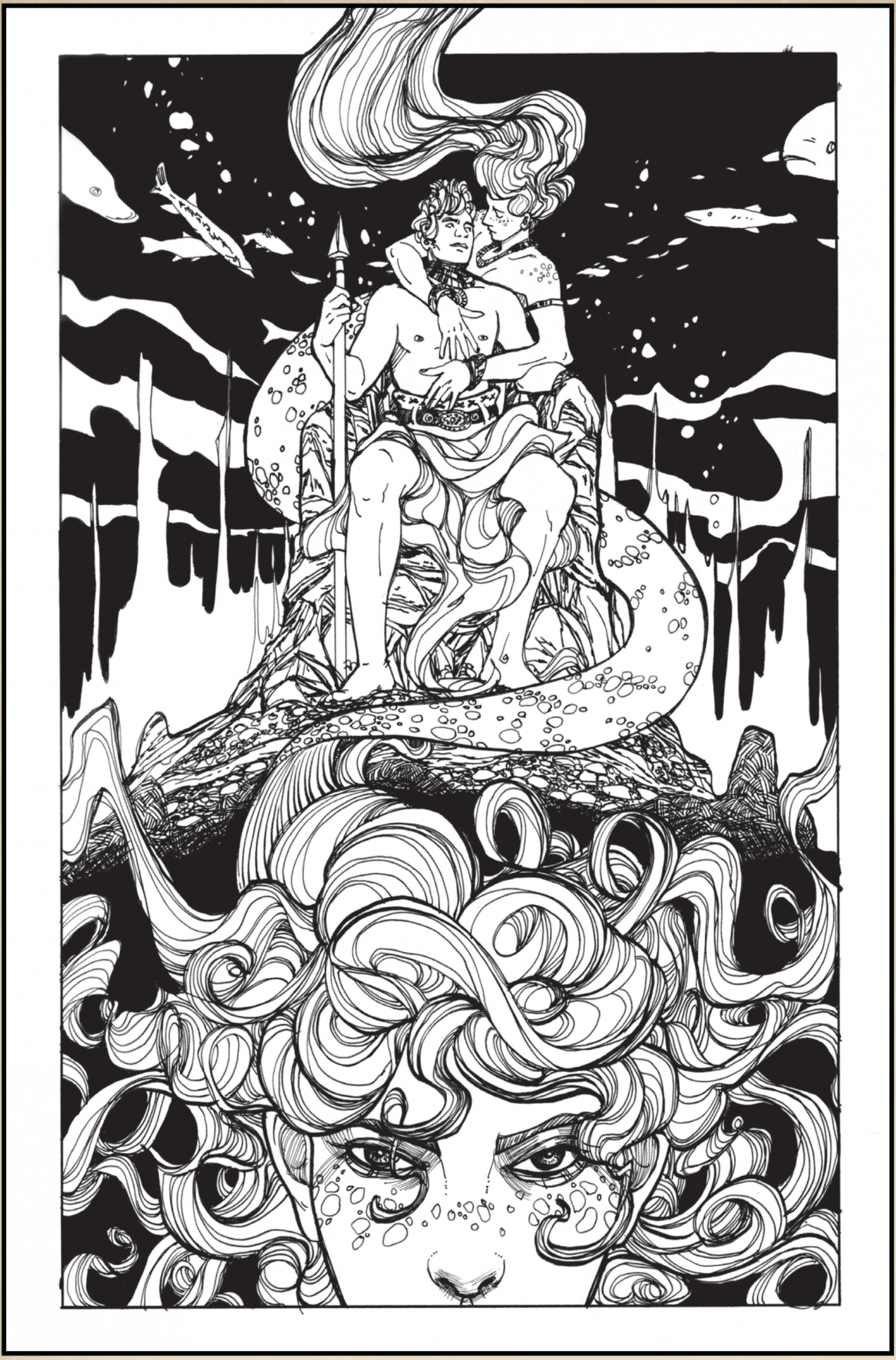
SW: We've finally come to the reveal of our selkie character's true nature here, as well as Willa's. In using one large, detailed panel, I wanted to slow down the moment, as our characters and the reader both process the reintroduction of the selkies.



Tale Three Art by Sarah Webb

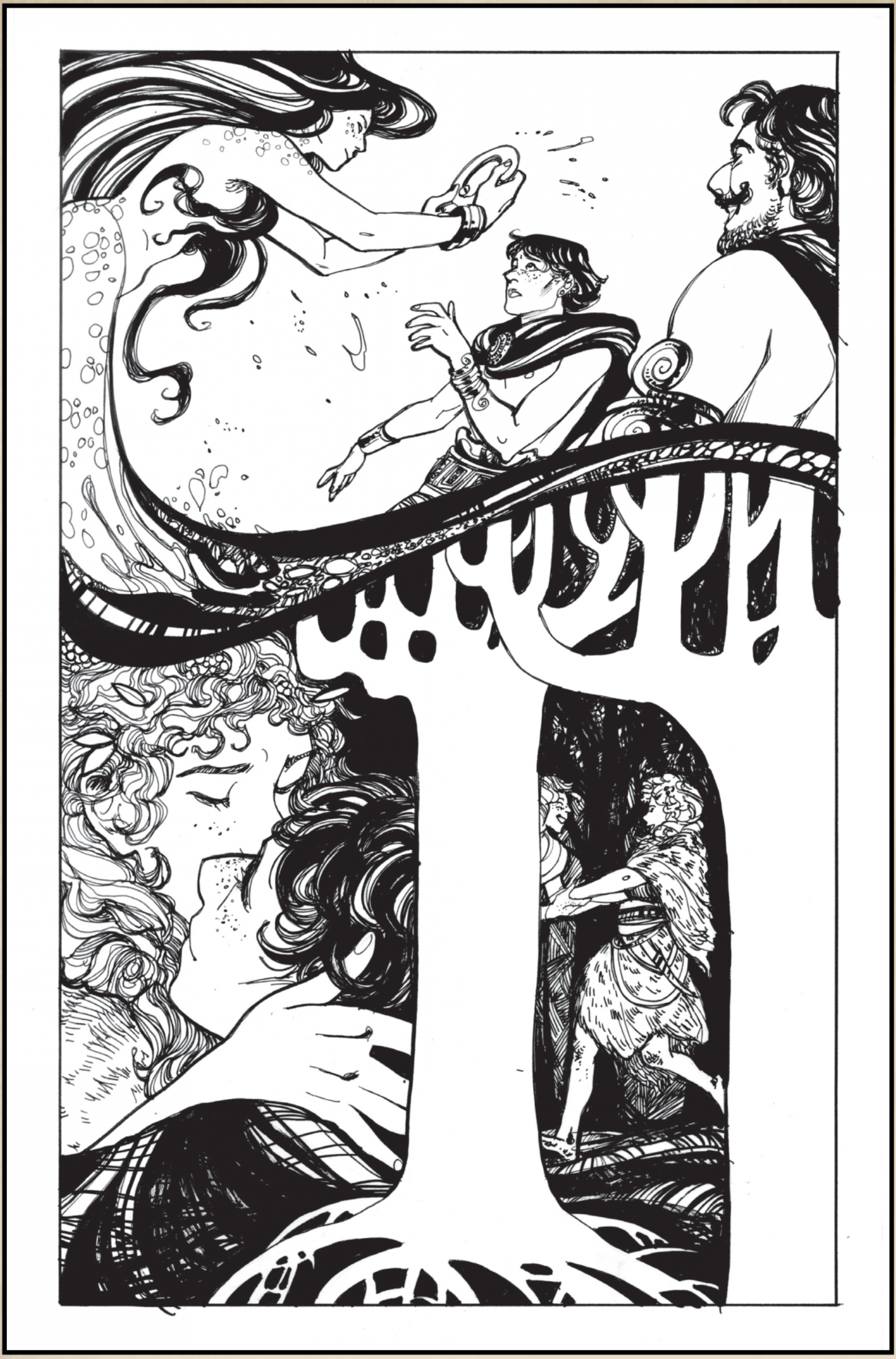
Webb: This is one of my favorite pages: it echoes the seals looking back on page seven, and I love using sweeping environments to show the emotional state of the characters.





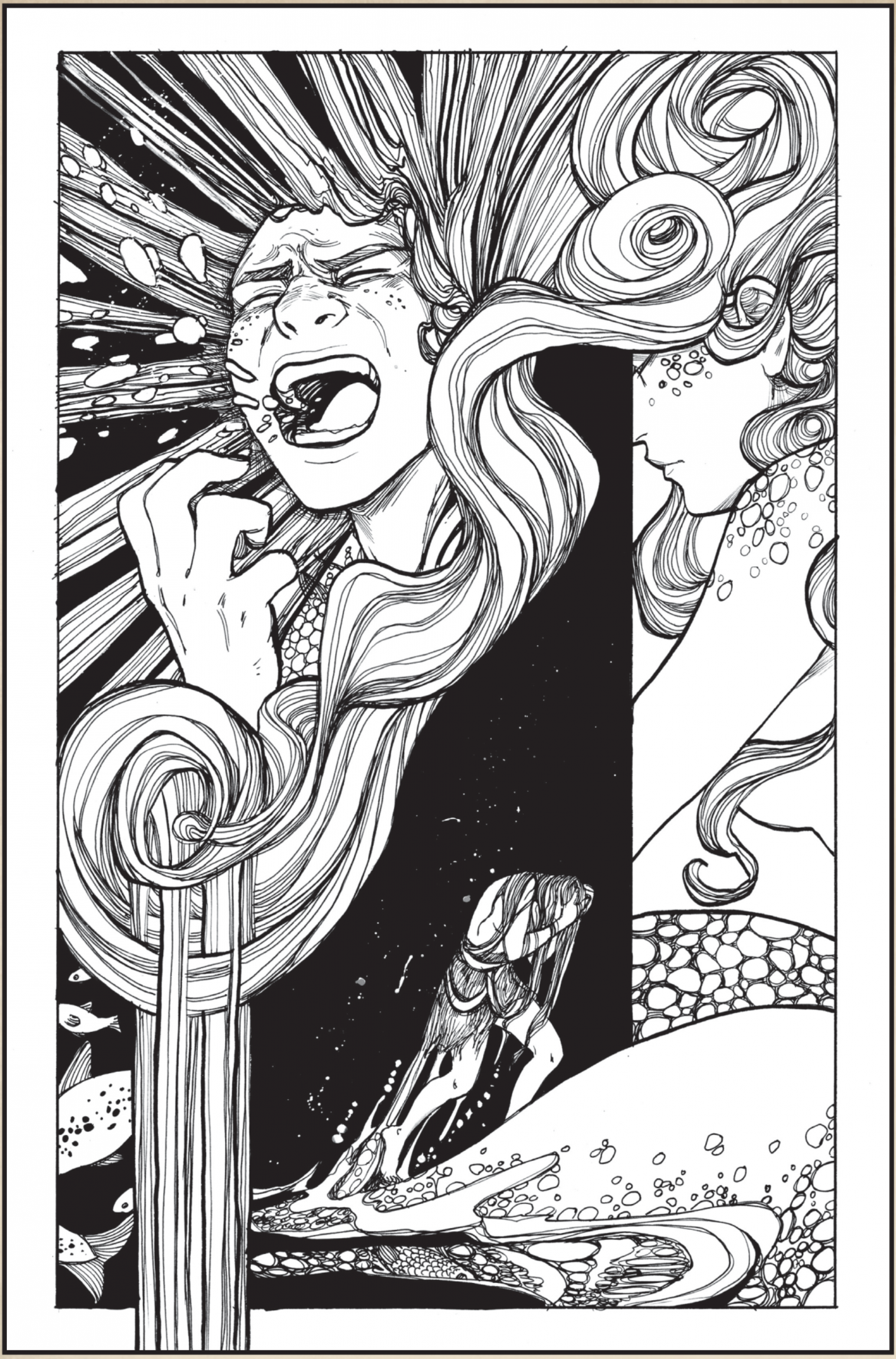
Tale Four Art by Aud Koch

Aud Koch Commentary: I felt a bit ridiculous drawing this illustration because of the obvious male power fantasy that it embodies. My balm was drawing Lorelei's gaze underneath. Those eyes at the bottom, that's how I feel about most stories about sirens. Those stories where they're nothing more than beautiful temptresses—boring!



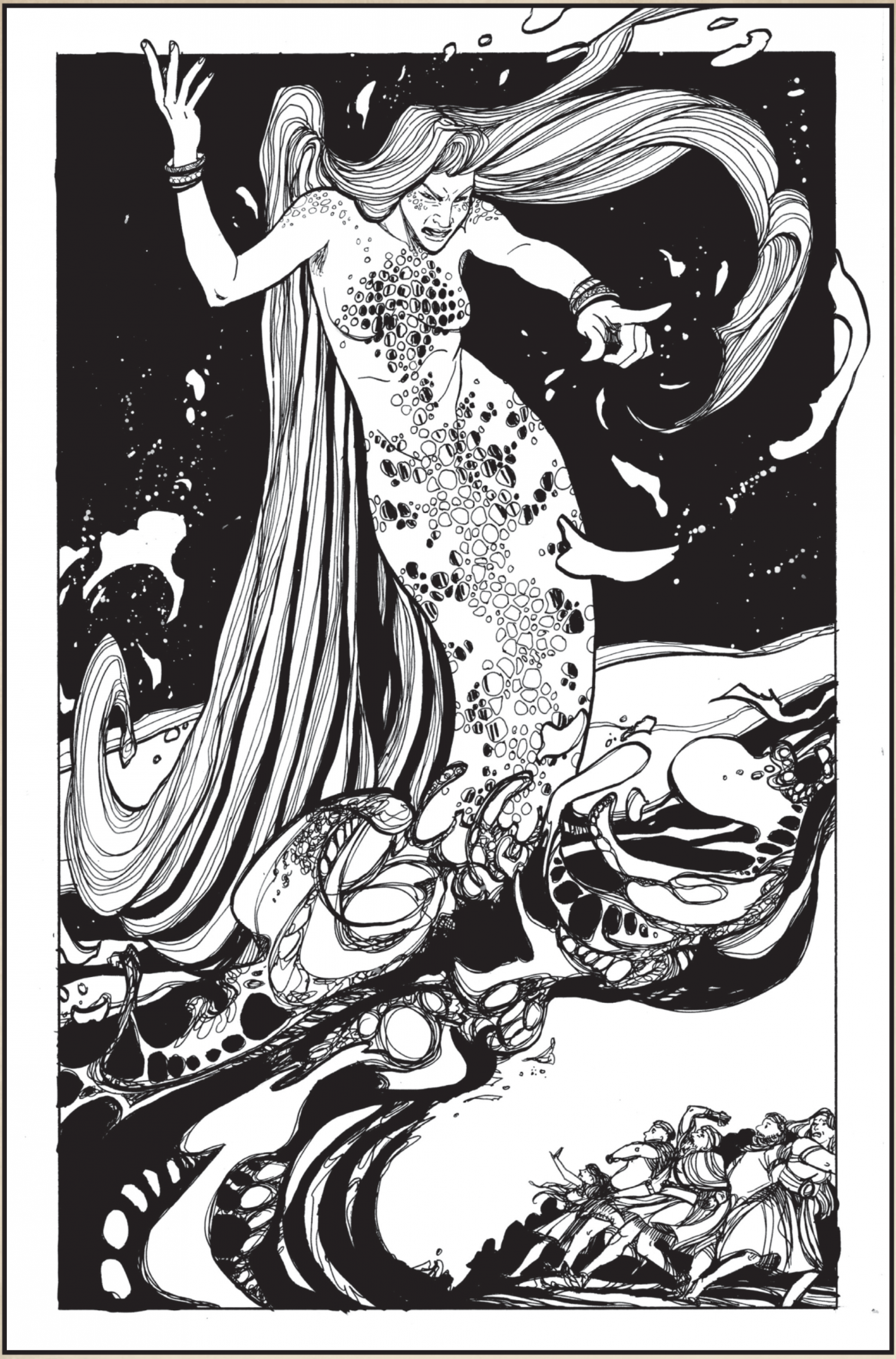
Tale Four Art by Aud Koch

AK: Within this storybook style of art, all things exist symbolically rather than representationally, and so all elements in an illustration can be played around with in order to promote the flow of the composition or to aid in reading clarity. Thus, the trees are white silhouettes and Lorelei tapers into a panel border.



Tale Four Art by Aud Koch

AK: When I am penciling an illustration, the page often begins as nothing more than a mad scribble of flow-lines. I establish what the flow needs to be first, and then the forms of the characters follow, conforming to the flow-lines (rather than conforming strictly to the rules of anatomy or perspective). This strategy is clear on this page, with the decorative swirl of Lorelei's hair and the arch of Sofia's back as she drags herself out of the water.



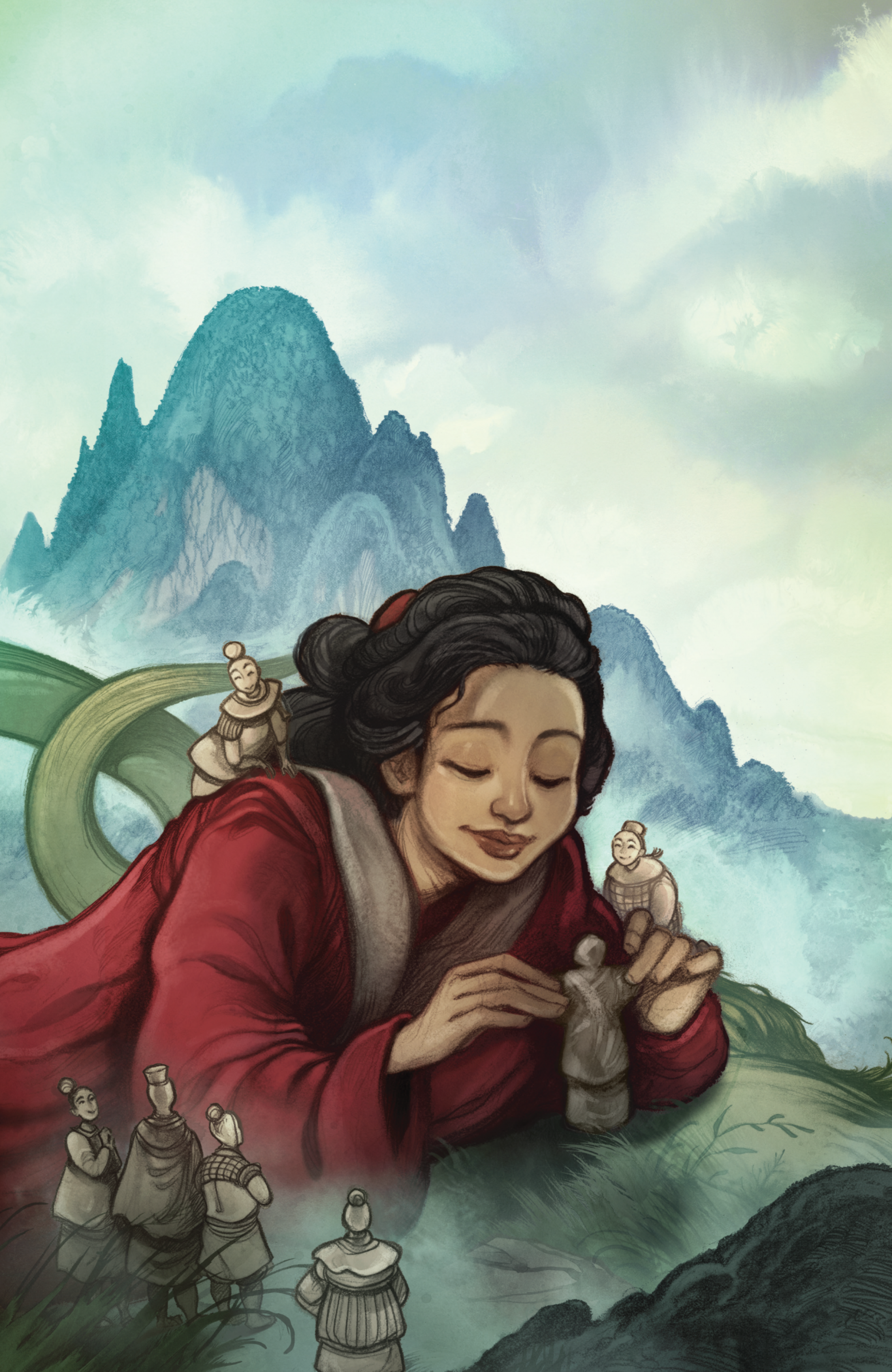
Tale Four Art by Aud Koch

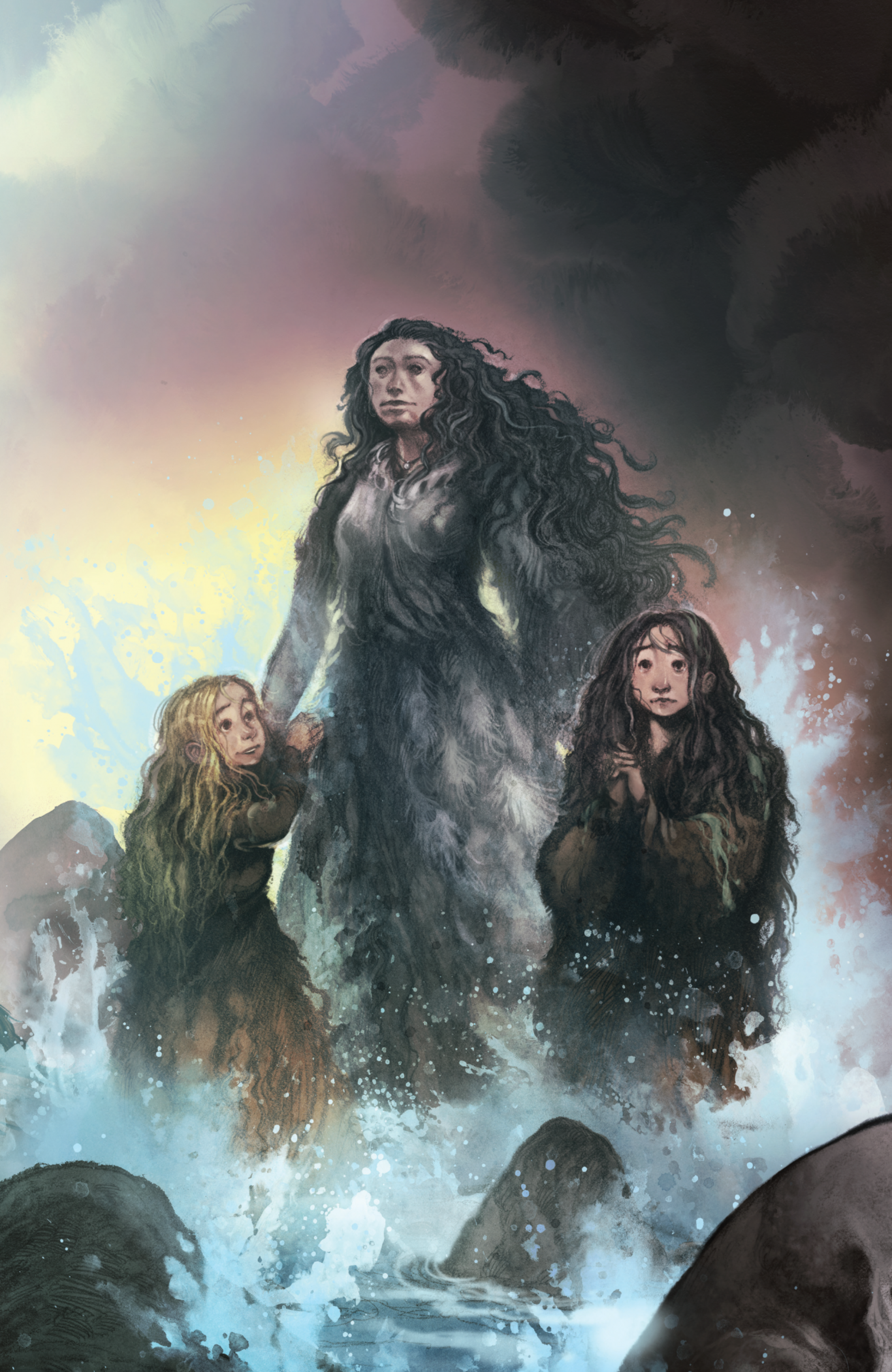
AK: Most of my ink details don't exist in my pencils. My pencils exist only to figure out the flow of the page and to block out the general shapes of things. I really love seeing where my inks will take me when I don't have a guide to follow, and the splashing, frothing water on this page is an example of this.

COVER GALLERY

COVERS BY

CORY GODBEY





the STORYTELLERS

Bartosz Sztybor was born in March of 1983 in Warsaw, Poland, a city where you can easily spot a mermaid around every corner. For almost 20 years he has been writing scripts for comic books, picture books, movies, television series, and one really stupid docudrama. He has won some awards for his work, in Poland and abroad, including two that probably mean something.

Jakub Rebelka lives in Gdansk, Poland along with his wife and two sons. For BOOM! Studios, he created the series *Namesake* with Steve Orlando and the series *Judas* with Jeff Loveness. Along with Johan Radomski, he released the fantasy story *City of Dogs*. He enjoys creating illustrations and painting pictures, and he loves nature, walking in the forest, and lighting bonfires.

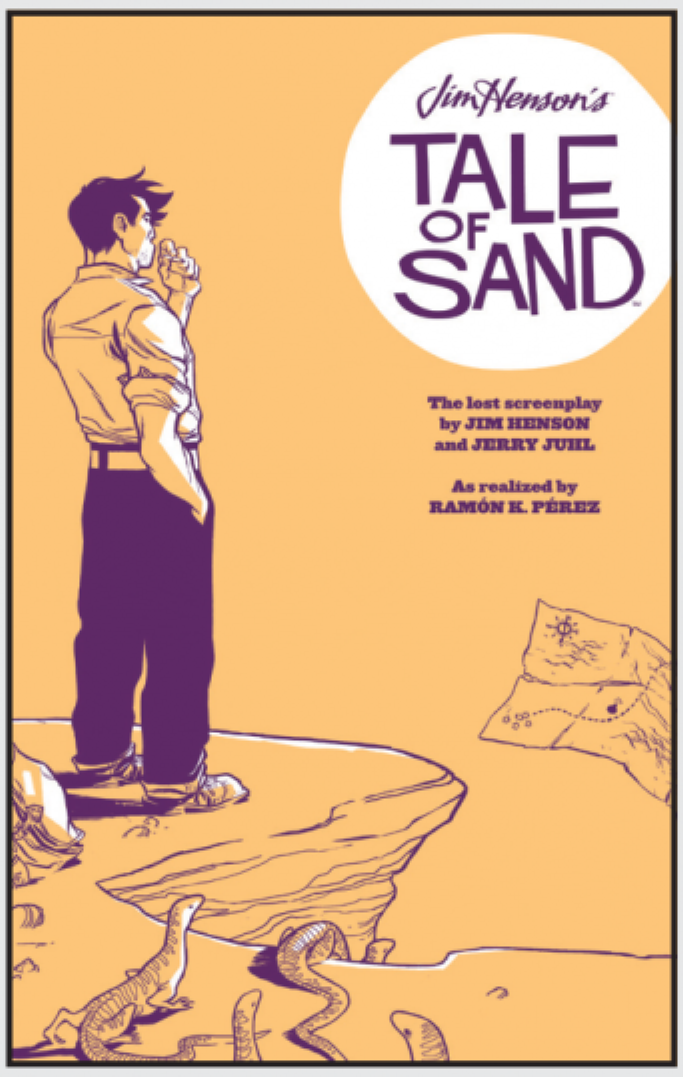
Chan Chau is a cartoonist based out of the Midwest. They spend a lot of time indoors chipping away at their artwork, but enjoys occasionally cooking and playing with their cat, Rue, during their downtime. Their work is inspired by close interpersonal relationships, cultural dissonance, diasporic experiences, and East Asian comics. Chan has their work featured in an Eisner- and Ignatz-winning comic anthology *(Elements: Fire)* and has been involved in TV animation as a storyboard revisionist and designer.

Sarah Webb is a freelance cartoonist, illustrator, and vis-dev artist from Alaska, now located in Los Angeles. She is currently creating the queer fantasy webcomic *Kochab*, and painting backgrounds at Cartoon Network. Her work is inspired by wandering around in the woods, folktales, and the small strangenesses within everyday life.

Aud Koch. During the drive to the hospital, when Aud's mom was in labor and it was the dead of night, her parents saw a stag bound through the beams of their headlights. A glimpse of antlers and a flash of white tail—and then the deer disappeared into the night-shadows, moving on its journey through the thickets of Missouri as surely as her parents went along theirs. And then Aud was born, and Aud began to move on her own journey through the world, flashing through people's headlights here and there.

DISCOVER

THE WORLD OF JIM HENSON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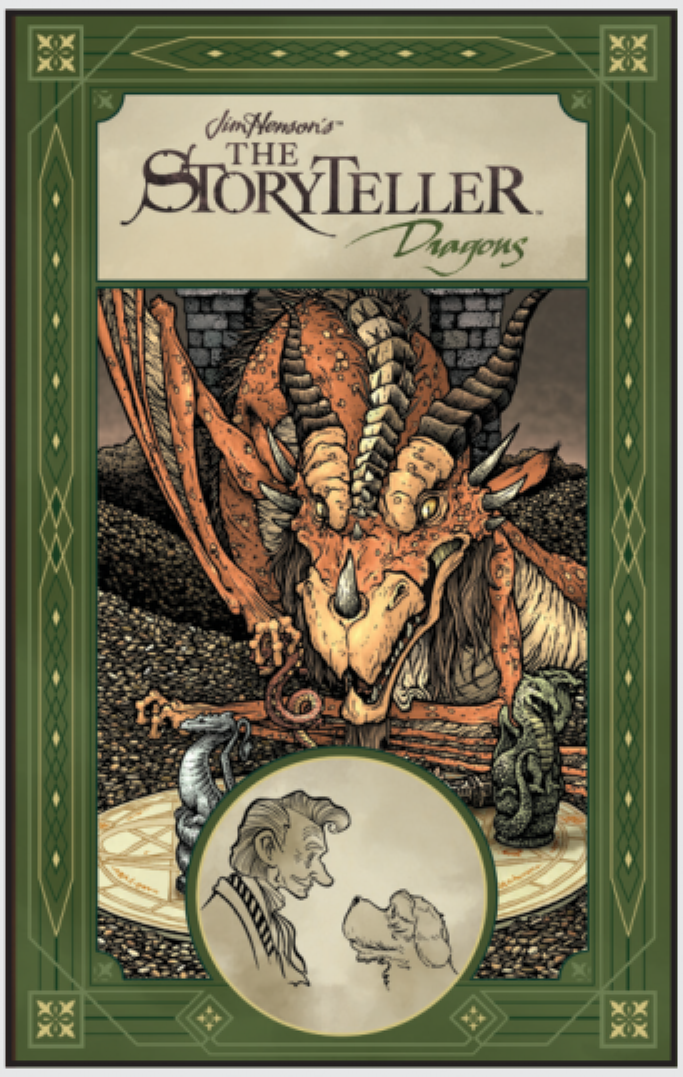
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